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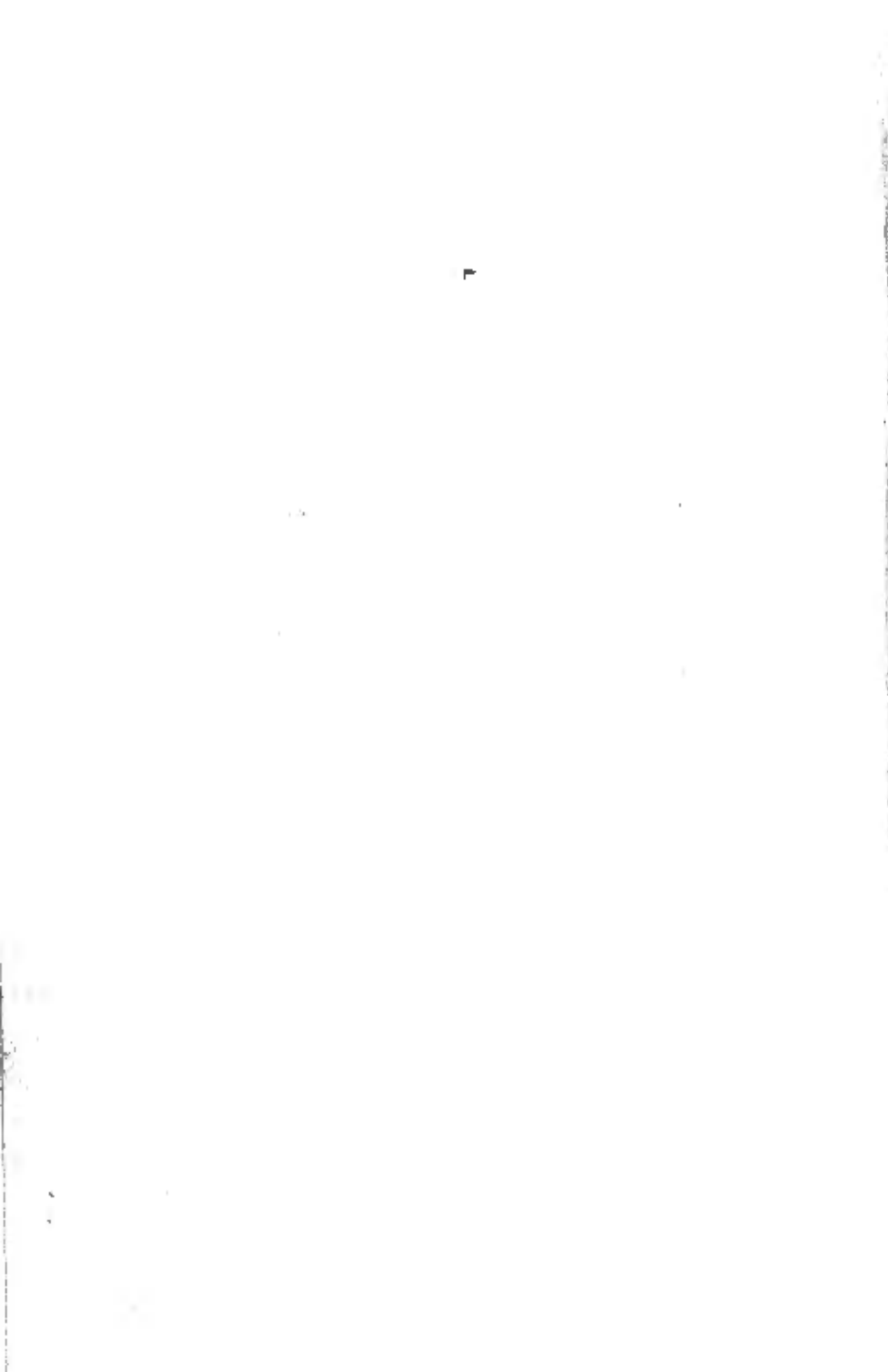
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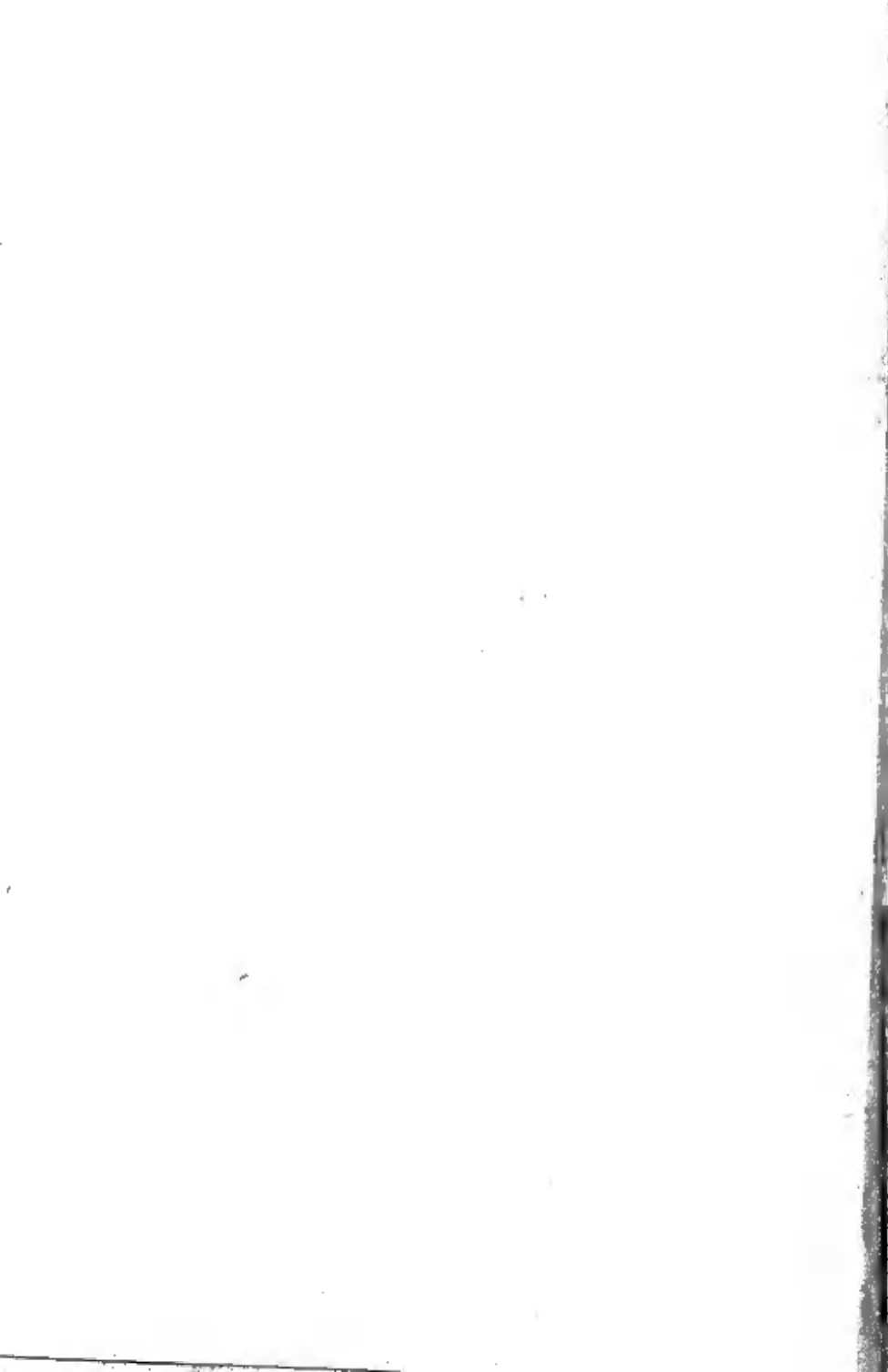
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**TO SANJAY AND AJAI**

*'Knowledge is certainly one  
of the means of pleasure'*

*—SAMUEL JOHNSON*



## CONTENTS

Preface	1
Origin, Habitat & General Characteristics	3
Domestic Life	23
Law & Customs	56
Religion	87
Superstition and Folklore	115
Index	133

Things Book Else in 2/87 7/1, 13.50, 2/22 1/4 1/2 1/2





## PREFACE

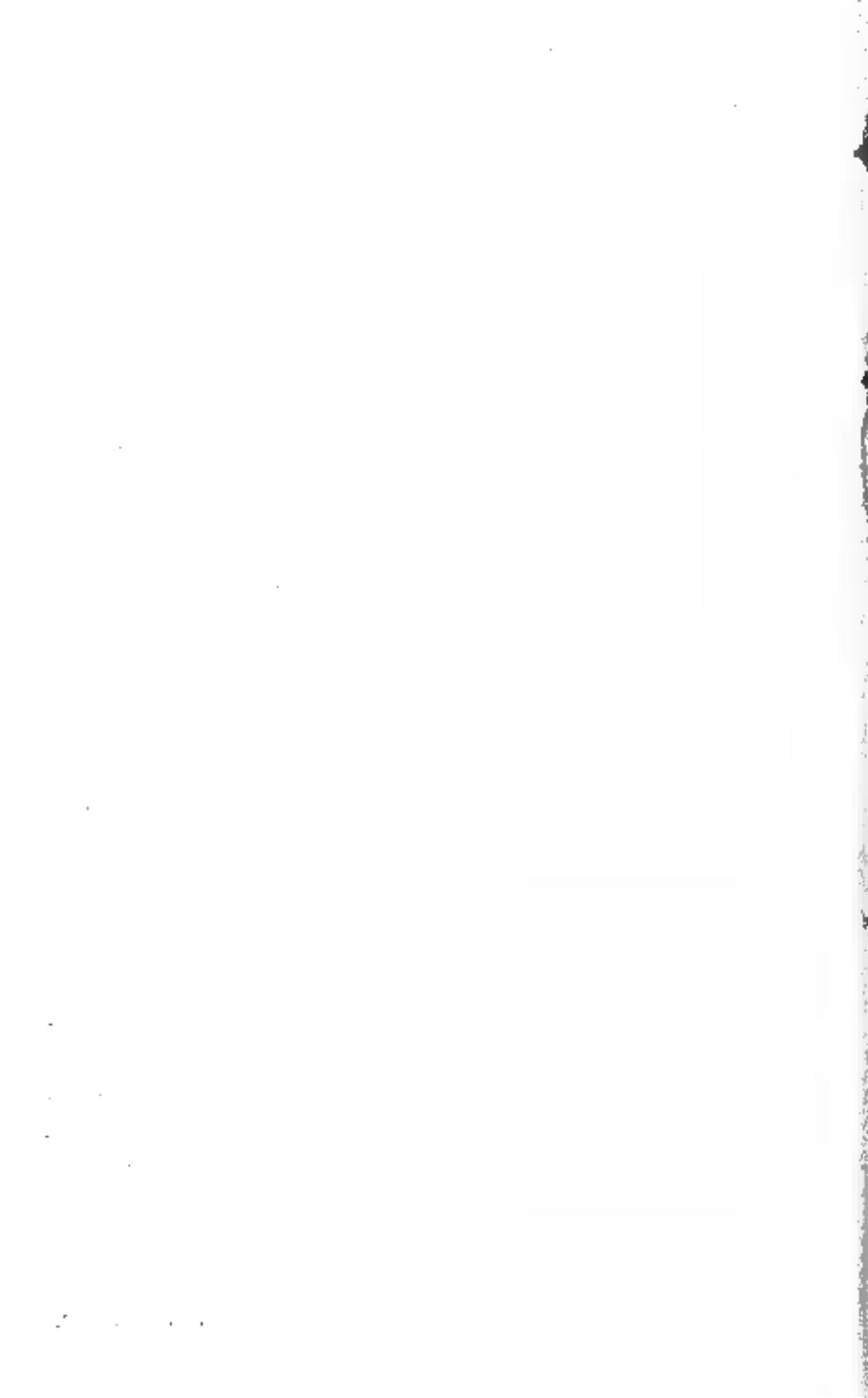
The state of Assam is one of the most interesting parts of India from the ethnological point of view, for some of the most picturesque tribes had their homes here. The colourful Nagas, the Khasis, Garos, Mikirs, Kacharis, Santhals, and the Meitheis, are all tribes of ancient origin, with curious and quaint customs.

An account of the habits and customs of these ancient tribes, their beliefs and faiths, and their folklore, is bound to enthrall and instruct. These accounts can be classified under the following main heads :

1. Origin and Habitat
2. General Appearance : Physical and Mental Traits
3. Domestic Life
4. Religion
5. Superstition and Folklore.

Modernism has destroyed much of the old glamour of these tribes, for the ease of communication and the consequent ingress of civilisation, and the desire to keep with the times, has made drastic changes in their mode of living, with a tendency towards uniformity and equalisation. An attempt has been made in these pages to recapture the vanished glory, the charming manners and customs, and the colourful tradition of these races, to unfold once again the gay panorama of their engrossing history.

It is proposed to consider each of these tribes under the above mentioned heads, and to present to the reader a brief resume of their erstwhile traditions, customs and history.



## Origin, Habitat & General Characteristics

### The Nagas

The Nagas are a most singular race of people. They are of different classes, even though they have many characteristics in common. There are the Angami Nagas, the Ao Nagas, the Lhotas, the Regmas, Semas, the Nagas of the North-Eastern hills, and those of Cachar and Manipur, to mention only a few. The tribes are constantly forming new groups and associations, like the Chakhesangs, Zeliangs, Shamnyu-yungmangs and others. Thus the Nagas have quite a number of clans and affiliations.

The origin of the word 'Naga' is interpreted in all sorts of different ways. One belief is that it is derived from the Assamese word 'naga' (Sanskrit 'nagna') meaning 'naked', for the reason that the Nagas were comparatively ill-clad. It could also be from the vernacular 'nag' which means a mountain. Or it may be the corrupted form of 'log' meaning 'people'. In fact some Naga tribes use the word 'nok' for people, which closely resembles the Hindi word 'log'.

The Nagas are a kind of Indo-Mongoloids whose presence was noted as early as the 10th Century before Christ, at the period of the Vedas. They were known as 'Kirata' or non-Aryans, and were described in ancient Sanskrit literature as subsisting on the flesh of the animals they hunted, roots and fruits of the forest, a warlike race, dressed in skins, and wielding formidable weapons. They are described as 'golden

hued' in contrast to the dark complexioned people of the plains. It is also mentioned that they were rich, having exploited the plentiful minerals available in the hill regions and the forest produce of the mountain-sides. They were also expert weavers, a trait which exists amongst the race even now. It is mentioned in the *Mahabharata* that the great god Shiva took the form of a Kirata, with his consort Uma in the guise of a Kirata woman, and went in this form to meet the warrior Arjuna. Thus it is evident that the Nagas are not an alien race, but are a branch of the rich and varied tribes of India.

Nagaland is now split up into three districts viz, Kohima, Mokokchung and Tuensang. These are administered from Kohima. The southern base is Manipur, with Burma on the east, Naga to the north, and the Assam valley on the west side. The Naga country is covered largely with hill ranges having many spurs and ridges, and occasional gentle slopes. The height varies from four thousand to about ten thousand feet above sea level. The population is concentrated on the higher hills. Rainfall varies from 70 to 100 inches in the year. Numerous rivers and streams flow through Nagaland, but there is a marked absence of lakes and tanks.

Much of the forest has been cut down to make way for cultivation, and most of the wild game has already been exploited. Thus there are few wild animals left, like elephants, tigers, leopards and so forth. The Indian hornbill bird is greatly prized by the Naga inhabitants. It is used for decoration, and magic is also associated with it. The Naga State has a population of 5.16 lakhs and an area of 16,527 square kilometres according to the 1971 census.

The traditional belief is that the Naga tribes migrated from the south, except in the case of the Kacha Nagas whose ancestors are said to have come from the mountains known as Japvo. There exists an isolating tendency amongst the race. One can almost categorise the type of Naga by a mere study of facial characteristics. In some villages the men are of tall

stature, while others are marked out by the beauty of their women. Some are even distinguished by peculiar traits of character. For example, the villages of Kidima and Nerharma abound in men who are fond of litigation, and Tofima has the distinction of possessing a large number of Hars !

Various tales are told about the origin of the Nagas. The Angamis, Lhotas, and Semas are supposed to be descended from four brothers, and distinguished by the amount of clothing that they were authorised to wear. The eldest of these brothers was gentle and virtuous and so his parents gave him a picturesque dress to wear. The Angamis are his descendants. The second brother was troublesome and so he was given scantier clothing. He was the ancestor of the Aos. The third brother, from whom the Lhotas are said to have been descended, was much alike the second in conduct, and so he was clothed in much the same manner. The youngest brother, the ancestor of the Semas, was markedly wicked. When his parents sent him to scare away the birds from the field, he neglected his task and plucked off all the pumpkins. Fed up with his naughtiness, his parents tied a piece of cloth round his waist, and leaving him just like that, turned him out.

Another story is that the Naga tribes were all descended from one father, but he was the son of a second wife. The children of the first wife were given proper clothes, but the child of the second wife could get only a small piece of cloth which was sufficient only to wrap around the waist, and so his descendants still wear the kilt.

Yet another story of the origin of the Naga tribes is as follows : In the village of Kezakenoma there lived an old couple who had three sons. The sons used to take loads of paddy to spread out to dry on a huge stone. The heaps of paddy would multiply when laid on the stone due to the influence of a spirit living in it. One day the sons quarrelled among themselves about their precedence in spreading loads of paddy on the stone, and fearing that there would be bloodshed, their parents broke some eggs on the stone, laid firewood on it,

and set it afire. On being heated, the stone suddenly burst with a sound like thunder, and the spirit inhabiting it went up to heaven in a cloud of smoke. The three sons thereupon separated, and became the ancestors of the Angamis, Lhotas and Semas. It is said that the great stone, cracked when its spirit flew away, still exists opposite the house of the original founder of the village.

There are several legends concerning the origin of the Nagas of Manipur. According to the Tangkhul legend, one day a sow was tracked down a valley by the younger of two brothers. The sow littered by the banks of the Iril River, and the young man stayed behind to look after her. He found the country so fascinating that he decided to stay there. He would send the produce of the plain country, to his brother whom he had left behind in the hills, and get presents in turn from the latter. After some time the younger brother stopped sending gifts, which so enraged his elder brother, that he came down and forcefully obtained them. Subsequently, perhaps based on this legend, a curious custom came into existence according to which the Tangkhuls would swoop down on the day of the Naga sports and loot the women vendors, which made the Manipuris prohibit their women from frequenting the market.

Another legend concerns the Marring Nagas. It is said that they left the valley because of the heat and the mosquitoes, taking fire with them. The fire was extinguished when they reached a ridge between Hundung and Ukrul, but to make up for it the deity taught them to get fire from stone. The sacred stone, *maibung*, stands there till this day.

A legend concerning the Tangkhuls is given by themselves as follows : Some of the Tangkhuls were trapped in a cave, from which they emerged one by one. But a large tiger, who was watching them, devoured each of them as soon as they emerged. Thereupon they took recourse to a stratagem. They dressed up an effigy to make it appear as a live man, and left it outside to distract the tiger's attention. Having done so they rushed out together, and the tiger was so greatly baffled by

seeing the crowd, that he fled. To mark the occasion they set up a large stone on the hill-top, which is there to this day.

A story which features the Nagas, the Kukis and the Manipuris, is about a jumping contest held between the representatives of the three tribes. The Kuki leapt from the top of one range to the crest of another. The Naga, too, jumped across, but his foot slipped and touched the water of the stream. The Manipuri tumbled right into the river. For this reason the Naga bathes only now and then, the Kuki scrupulously avoids it, and the Manipuri, because of his dropping headlong into the river, is rather fond of bathing.

A legend about the origin of the Marams is also interesting. A flood came and destroyed everyone except a couple of the name of Medungasi and Simoting. The couple wondered if they should get married, but since there was no one to advise them, they went out into the forest. Here a god appeared to the man and told him that they could marry but their descendants were forbidden to eat the flesh of the pig. Therefore to this day the Marams do not eat pork.

The origin of the Marring Nagas is also curious. It is said that fourteen of them, seven men and seven women, emerged from the earth. At that time the men and the women wore the same clothes (the dhoti). But in order to make a distinction, the men tied up their hair into a knot in front, and the women behind. The women lengthened their waist-cloth while the men shortened theirs. Not finding themselves comfortable in the plains they migrated into the hills, where they are living to this day. Another legend about the Marrings is that while they emerged from a cave, a horrible beast would devour them. The beast, however, was slain by a deity with two horns, and they could get out safely out of the cave.

A legend concerns the origin of the Vuites, another Naga clan. One day the head of the Thados clan of the name of Aisan Ningthon found two eggs in a basket. He ate one and found it bitter. The other he put aside, so that it may become



mature and nice to eat. From this egg, however, there emerged a lad who became chief of the Vuite clan.

Though constantly at war among themselves, the Nagas have a certain unity also. They intermarry only among their own clan, and not among tribes other than the Naga community. Though differing in build and complexion, they have common characteristics like a coarse and savage face, and a dull timid disposition. In the use of weapons, too, they have a similarity, for they all use only javelins and spears.

The Angami Naga is a particularly lithe and agile person. He is capable of a great deal of hard work and endurance, marches long distances and carries heavy loads. He has a curious way of bathing. The water from some stream is carried in a hollow bamboo, and the soap is made by pounding into pulp the fibrous stalk of a creeper which gives a lather like ordinary soap. A practice which has a smack of modernity is the wearing of wigs. The wigs were not worn by women, however, but by old men whose hair had greyed ! They were made of bear's hair, with human hair hanging at the back.

The Angamis were very fond of wearing something as an ear-ornament. This was not necessarily a silver or gold ear-ring, but anything which took their fancy, like plugs of black wool, pieces of red paper or cloth, and even the cog-wheel of a watch !

The men also wore cowries in rows of three or four. Originally these signified exploits in war, but gradually they became emblems of love, and the fourth line of cowries was worn by a man who had an intrigue with a married woman with two girls of the same name, with two daughters of one father, or with a mother and her daughter at one and the same time !

The Nagas eat mostly rice and meat, preferring beef and

pork. Though they have now started taking tea, and milk which was tabooed sometime ago, their favourite drink is rice beer of which they consume large quantities.

A word must be said about head-hunting. According to the Nagas themselves they got into this practice by seeing an ant and a lizard fight over a berry which a bird had dropped. The ant cut off the lizard's head! and thus provided the impetus to take heads. It is believed that the soul and its receptacle has its place in the head, so to bring home a head means capturing a great deal of spiritual power. Often it is the way to win the heart and hand of some lovely damsel in the tribe. Indeed at one time a Naga who had not won a head, could not get a decent girl in marriage. All these factors led to the Naga cult of head-hunting. So much was the desire for heads that they were taken most cruelly and treacherously. A man would hide near a tank, and suddenly pounce upon and kill any woman or child who came to draw water. Or a group of Nagas would swoop down upon a hapless village, particularly when the men were out in the field, and behead as many old persons, women, women and children as they could, and be off before the men of the village returned. Davis records that when some men of Mozema went to Kohima, they killed one man, five women, and twenty young children, for their heads, and one of the on-lookers told him 'that he never saw such a fine sport, for it was just like killing fowls'.\* Fortunately all this is past history, and the last recorded case of head-hunting was in 1958.\*

### **The Khasis**

The Khasis are found in the Khasi and Jaintia Hill districts of Assam in an area of about 6,157 square miles. A sub-division of the Khasis are the Syntengs (also called Pnars). While the Khasis inhabit mostly the Khasi Hills, the Syntengs

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\* A.W. Davis, *Census of India*, 1891, Vol. 1, pp. 237f.

\* Verrier Elwin, *Nagaland*.

are found in the Jaintia Hills. Apart from these two main tribes, the Lynngams inhabit the western portion of the Khasi Hills, the Bhois the hills to the north and north-east of the Kamrup and Sylhet districts, and the Wars are found in the south. Some Handem clans (sometimes called Kuki) are found in the extreme eastern portion of the Jaintia Hills.

The Khasis are brown in their complexion, varying from dark to light brown. The people living in the hills have a lighter complexion than those of the plains, and those dwelling in the village of Cherrapunji are particularly fair, while the Lynngams are the darkest of the Hill Khasis. The males cut their hair short, and keep a single lock at the back side which they call the 'grandmother's lock'.

The Khasis are short of stature with muscular bodies and highly developed calves. With such a body they can carry very heavy weights which they do by means of a band worn across the forehead. The women, too, are hardy and buxom, with greatly developed calves, which they pride in. The people are of a cheerful nature, fond of music, good humoured, good tempered, loving outdoor life, and attached to their families. The Khasis are in general an industrious race, capable of hard labour. They are enamoured of betels and betel-nuts, hard drinkers, and inveterate gamblers. Mc Cosh describes them thus : 'They are a powerful, athletic race of men, rather below the middle size, with a manliness of gait and demeanour. They are fond of their mountains, and look down with contempt upon the degenerate race of the plains, jealous of their power, brave in action, and have an aversion to falsehood'.

The origin of the Khasis is very uncertain. According to one view they are connected with the Burmese, to whose king they used, in the ancient days, to send an axe as an annual tribute to signify their submission. According to another tradition they came from the north and spread upto Sylhet; but from there they were driven back by a huge flood during which the Khasi lost his book while swimming (while the Bengali managed to retain his) which accounts for their having no

written characters up to a long time. Yet another theory has it that they originally came into Assam from Burma via the Patkoi Range. It seems most probable however, that they moved into Assam from the east, and are possibly an off-shoot of the Mon-Anam family of eastern India.

The Khasis lay great stress on the potency of the egg. They use it for divination, for religious sacrifices, place it on the stomach of a man who has died and afterwards break it on the funeral pyre. This suggests an affinity to certain tribes of the Malay Archipelago whose medicine man, called *gaji-guru*, can see from the yolk of an egg which he breaks while counting from one to seven, the disease of a man who is ill. The Khasis also worship the serpent demon, and in this way appear to be akin to the people of Pagan who were originally 'nagas' or serpent worshippers. The Palaung women even now wear a dress which is like the skin of a snake. Another custom which is similar to the one which the Khasis observe at birth, is that of mixing placenta with ashes and placing it in a pot hung from a tree. This custom is observed as ancestor worship in Mandeling on the west coast of Sumatra. Thus there may be possible affinity between the Khasis and these Sumatra tribes.

The Khasis have now become modernised in respect of dress, and men wear knicker-bockers, [stockings and boots, coat, waist-coat, a collar without tie, and a cloth peaked cap. The women wear a chemise, a short coat of velvet, stockings, and shoes. But in the ancient days the dresses were quite different, and much more colourful and picturesque. The male attire consisted of a sleeveless coat which left the arms bare, with a fringe at the bottom, and a row of tassels across the chest. The head wear consisted of a cap with ear-flaps, or a white turban. The women wore a number of garments, which made them look somewhat overdressed. Next to the skin was a piece of cloth called *ka jympien*, fastened to the loins by a cloth belt. Over this a long piece of cloth hanging loosely from the shoulders down to a little above the ankles, called *ka jainsem*. Over the *jainsem* there was a sort of cloak of a gay colour called *ka jain kup*. A wrapper, either white or of some

bright hue, was cast around the head and shoulders. This was known as the *ka-tap-moh-khlieh*.

The Khasis also wear considerable jewellery. The women are fond of gold and coral bead necklaces, the beads being a hollow sphere filled with lac. A peculiar ornament is the silver or gold crown with tassels of the same metal hanging down the back, which is worn by young women at dances. Both men and women wear ear-rings and silver chains. The men wear the chains round their waist like a belt and the women hang them round their necks—dangling almost to their waists ! The Lyingam men also wear cornelian bead necklaces called '*pieng blai* or 'necklaces of the gods'.

A peculiar ornament is the *rupa-tyilt* or silver collar—a broad, flat, silver collar, hanging down from the neck, and secured by a fastening behind. Gold and silver bracelets are also worn. The Lyingam and Garo women wear so many brass ear-rings that their ear lobes are greatly distended. Their necklaces have a large number of blue beads of glass. After a Lyingam man has given a big feast he is entitled to wear silver armlets above the elbows and on his wrist.

The Khasis use swords, spears, bows and arrows as weapons, and carry shields for defence. They also knew about gunpowder and used the cannon. The swords they use are very heavy and cumbersome because they are forged, handle and blade, from wrought iron or occasionally, steel. The spear is about six and a half feet long with a wooden or bamboo handle. The bow (*ka ryntieh*) is the Khasi's favourite weapon. Two kinds of arrows are discharged from it—the one with a barbed head (*ki-pling*), used for hunting, and the other with a plain head (*sop*), used for archery, which is the Khasi's national game. The shield is circular, and is made of hide. It is studded with brass or silver. The Mikirs or Bhois use the spear and the bill-hook merely for cutting down jungle. They are the peaceful type of Khasis, quiet and hard working, and devoted to their work. Of them, Butler says : 'Unlike any other hill tribes of whom we have knowledge, the Mikirs seem devoid

of anything approaching to a martial spirit. They are a quiet industrious race of cultivators, and the only weapons used by them are the spear and the *da* hand-bill for cutting down jungle. It is said, after an attempt to revolt from the Assamese rule, they were made to forswear the use of arms, which is the cause of the present generation having no predilection for war'.

### The Garos :

The Garos are inhabitants of the hills known by that name, (about 3,140 square miles), which are bounded on the north and west by the district of Goalpara, on the south by Mymensingh, and on the east by the Khasi Hills. But they have also spread to the surrounding districts.

The Garos are darker than their neighbours, the Khasis, and have Mongolian features. They generally have wavy or curly hair, though sometimes they also wear it straight. Colonel Dalton's description of the Garos in his *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* is significant : 'Their faces are round and short. The forehead is not receding, but projects very little beyond the eye, which is small, on a level with the face, very dark and obliquely set. The want of prominence in the nose is remarkable. The whole face has the appearance of being flattened, the mouth sharing in the compressed appearance and not at all prognathous'.

The Garos are short in stature, and though hardy, they do not show the development of the lower limbs which is a marked characteristic of their neighbours, the Khasis. Those living on the higher ranges are somewhat healthier. Some keep beards, but their moustaches usually have only a few hair because they pull out the rest. The hair styles are the same for both men and women. They keep the hair tied up in a knot behind, or wear a pugree. The women are buxom and healthy when young, though they lose their beauty quickly with age. Their ears have to bear the weight of enormous ear-rings which quite often breaks their ear-lobes into two—and this is a great disfigurement.

The Garos are friendly and pleasant by nature, and straightforward, honest and tactful. They are very much taken up by litigation. They have few vices, and apart from their passion for drinking, they are an abstemious race, for they do not take any hemp or opium, abstain from gambling, and are not indebted. As regards personal cleanliness, the Garos leave much to be desired, for they seldom bathe. On the whole they are a peaceful, law abiding race, cheerful and light hearted, industrious and conscientious.

The principal garment worn by the Garos is the *gando*, which is a strip of blue cotton cloth with stripes of red. It passes between the legs and is then wound round the waist, and tucked in at the back. Sometimes the end of the flap has rows of white conch-shell beads. On his head the Garo wears a turban of dark blue or white cotton cloth, but for especial occasions he dons one of red silk with an ornamented fringe. The turban is wound in many folds round and round, but leaves the top of the head bare. There is a strange belief to account for this. It is said that the huluk ape, when it sees the tangled hair on top of the head, calls out 'huh! huh!' in derision as if to say 'what a miserable head of hair' and runs off into the branches of a tree. Thus, keeping the head bare drives off the ape! When it is cold the Garo puts a cotton cloth or a blanket over his shoulders, otherwise the *gando* is all that he wears. At a dance the Garo man might wear a garment called *pandra*—a black cloth reaching to the waist, wound around the body and laced across with white cotton bands.

The women's main garment is the *riking*, which consists of a cloth just big enough to encircle the waist, like a petticoat. It is fastened on the top with two strings, and leaves the thighs bare. The women leave their bosom uncovered, except when it is cold, when they cover themselves with a shawl, generally of a blue and white cloth. On festive occasions the women wear a dress of coloured silk much of the kind worn by Khasi women, called a *marang-jasku*. The women sometimes go bare-headed, and at other times wear a turban like those of the

men, or a folded turban called the *odoreka* or *salchak*, which is almost in the form of a cap.

As in other tribes, both men and women among the Garos wear ornaments. The men wear two kinds of brass rings in their ears. Those worn in the lobe are called *nadogbi* or *olonga*, and as many as thirty or forty are worn in each ear ! In the upper part of the ear they wear a very small brass ring called *nadrong*, which is sometimes ornamented with four small brass discs attached to the outer and lower edge. Occasionally a semi-circular piece of brass, silver, or crystal, to which a string of beads is attached, is added to it.

Men and women both wear necklaces with barrel-shaped red beads. On festive occasions the *kadisl* is worn. This is a round circular ornament with brass studs, worn round the head. Another strange kind of ornament which only the village headman is entitled to wear is the *jacksl*. This is a particularly heavy ring, usually of iron, but sometimes of brass or silver, worn just above the elbow.

The women, like the men, also wear many varieties of ornaments. They too wear brass rings, called *shishas*, in their ears, but of a much larger size, and heavier. Often more than fifty rings are worn in each ear, and the inevitable consequence is that the ear lobes can't bear the weight and get torn. Despite this the rings are not done away with. Instead, they are tied together by a strong string, and supported from the head ! The women of the Akawes and Chisak tribes wear an enormous necklace of many many rows of blue and white or red beads, which hangs very low over their bosoms.

When a man dies, his widow must take off her ear-rings. An adulterous woman was in the old days punished by tearing off her ear-rings. But afterwards she was required only to take them off and not wear them till she was absolved of the charge of infidelity.

The women wear a kind of waist-band called *senki*,



which has in it several rows of cylindrical shaped beads. Brass and bronze bracelets, too, are worn. A peculiar and spectacular head ornament, which is worn by women who take part in a dance, is the *piint* or *salchak-maldong*. This is a bamboo comb which the woman sticks into the knot of her hair at the back. A strip of cloth, ornamented with cylindrical beads, is attached to the comb, and this hangs down the back of the head.

The weapons used by the Garos are the sword, spear, and occasionally the bow. They have, of course, the shield for defence. The swords are very ill-designed and cumbersome to use. The grip is curved and very thin, and ends in a sharp edge, so that the sword can be stuck on the ground by his side when a Garo halts. In fact the sword is more of use in clearing brushwood and jungle growth, than as a weapon. ■ is made from hilt to the point, of one piece of iron. The Garo spear is much better and more effective. Its blade is exceedingly sharp, and it is attached firmly to the bamboo shaft. Bears, and even tigers, can be killed by the spear, and it is used for slaughtering pigs for food. Unlike the Khasis, the Garos seldom use the bow.

The shields are of two kinds. The *sepi* is of wood. It consists of flat pieces of wood bound by thin cane strips. The other kind is the *danti*, made of bear-skin or cow-hide stretched on a wooden frame.

### The Mikirs

The Mikirs are mostly found in the hills which bear their name. The origin of the name 'Mikir' is not known. They call themselves 'Arlengs', which means 'man'. Their complexion is a light yellow brown, and they are tall and muscular. Like the Khasis, they can carry heavy burdens upon their back. They wear a thin moustache, and their hair is gathered into a knot which hangs behind the head. The girls are often fair complexioned.

The Mikir dresses almost like the Khasi. He wears a

dhoti of cotton, or if wealthy, of silk. His coat is a sleeveless striped jacket with a long fringe behind. A thick wrapper called *bor-kapor* is worn in the cold weather. On the head there is a cap of black and red cloth, or a turban.

The women wear a petticoat of white cloth with red stripes, secured round the waist by an ornamental girdle. The upper garment is a wrapper drawn under the arms and tightly lacing the breasts. Normally they are bare-headed, but use a black scarf in funeral dances. Their hair is drawn back and tied into a knot. When a girl attains puberty it is usual for her to tattoo a vertical line with indigo down the middle of her forehead, her nose, upper lip and chin.

The ornaments are the usual ones. The ear ornament is a large silver tube inserted into the lobes of the ear. Ordinarily ear-rings of gold or silver are also worn. Necklaces of gold, silver, or coral beads are worn, and on festive occasions, feathers in the turban.

The weapons, too, are the usual ones—a long knife, a spear, and bows and arrows. The bow is made of bamboo with a string of strong bamboo fibre.

### **The Kacharis**

The Kacharis are widely spread in Assam, but they are to be found outside also, in the north-east of Bengal, in Koch-Berar, and in the Tippura Hills. The branch of this race which became powerful was in the kingdom of Kamarupa (Koch). The earliest mention of the Eastern branch of the Kacharis is under the name of the Chutiyas. The Ahoms, with whom they had a long struggle, were ultimately victorious, and drove the Kacharis to the foot of the Naga Hills. But the Ahoms pressed on their victory, and the Kachari Raja moved to Maibong, and then to Khaspur in Kachar. Here the Kacharis came under Hindu influence, and their kings, Krishna Chandra and his brother Govinda Chandra, professed Brahminism. It is said that they were placed inside a huge copper replica of ■

cow, and on emerging were declared Kshatriyas, descendants of Bhima of the *Mahabharata*. Consequently the Darrang Kacharis consider themselves to be children of Bhima (*bhima-ni-fsa*).

King Govinda Chandra's reign was short. The Burmese constantly oppressed him, and finally drove him to Sylhet. He was reinstated in power with the help of the East India Company, but later he was murdered and his kingdom became part of the British dominion.

The Kacharis are distinctly separated into the Northern and Southern races. There is no intermarriage between the two, and the dialects also greatly differ. A story is related about the reason for this cleavage which has to do with the war of the tribe with the Ahoms. It is said that the Ahoms were pursuing the Kacharis, and their king, Dimasa, had to retreat when hard pressed. But the retreat was stopped by a deep river. Thus King Dimasa was in a fix, with the enemy on one side and the river on the other. In the night when he slept, he had a dream in which a god appeared and said that the king and his army should enter the river at a spot where they saw a heron standing in the water, but no one should look back. Next morning the king saw a heron, as the god had said, and led his men to the spot. They found that the river had turned mysteriously shallow there, and began to get across. But while some had managed to get across, others were in the middle of the river, and yet others still this side of it, a man, wondering if his son was following or not, looked back. Immediately the waters deepened, and everyone had to cope with this unexpected turn of events. Some saved themselves by clutching rushes (*khagris*) and are consequently known as Khagrabarias. Others caught hold of reeds (*nals*) and are called Narbarias. The Dimasas were those who could get across safely.

### The Meitheis.

The Meitheis are residents of Manipur State. The country given the name of Methai Leipak is their abode, On the

west there lies the district of Cachar, the frontier touches Upper Burma, and towards the south there are the Chin and the Lushai Hills.

About their origin there is a legend according to which at the beginning of the Kaliyuga age was born one Pakhangba, who would assume the form of a god in the day and a man at night. It is said he could change shape at will and turn himself into a snake, but unfortunately his life was cut short by an unhappy accident in which his son, seeing him in the house and mistaking him for someone else, killed him with a spear. According to another story, the ancestry of the first ruling King of Manipur, Pakhangba, is traced to Brahma himself. According to Colonel McCulloch several tribes occupied Manipur, viz, the Koomuls, the Looangs Moirangs and the Meithei, and by degrees the last named subdued them all. It seems most likely that the Meitheis are descended from the surrounding hill tribes, and have close connection with the Nagas. The inhabitants of Manipur account for the name from the word '*mani*' or jewel, which the Rajas of old possessed.

In appearance the Meitheis approach the Aryan type. Their girls are fair, sometimes with brownish-black hair, brown eyes, and rosy cheeks. The unmarried girls wear the hair behind their heads, combed back and tied into a knot, and left loose. The hair is combed forward in the front and cut, so as to reach a little above the eyebrow. Married women grow their hair long, comb it back from the forehead, and tie it into a knot behind.

The men are strong, well built and muscular. Their stature varies, some being tall and others short. They have wide chests and well developed limbs. The men wear their hair long, combed back from the forehead and gathered into a coil behind. Beards and moustaches are uncommon.

As regards dress, there used to be many restrictions imposed by the old rulers. For example, certain articles of dress could be worn only if permitted by the Raja, particularly in his

presence. Thus a silk dhoti with purple patterns, or an orange coloured one, could be worn only by the princes and the sons-in-law of the Raja, and not by persons of inferior rank. A red or pink dhoti could be worn in the presence of the ruler only by privileged persons. Turbans with silk borders could not be worn in the royal presence. In the same way, women could not wear gold embroidered *chadars* in the presence of the Raja. The carrying of pieces of cloth of different colours, which the Meitheis used as rugs, also had a formal usage. Persons of high rank could carry a red wollen cloth, those of a lesser rank a green wollen one, and those of a rank lower, a cotton cloth.

In general, the men adopted the usual Indian dress, viz, the dhoti and *kurta*, and occasionally a *chadar*. In winter a padded coat with long sleeves and big collars is worn by those who can afford it. A short pugree forms the head gear.

The women wear a piece of cloth called a *fanek*, covering the lower body. This is hitched up to the knee and tucked in at the waist. It is of cotton or silk, with horizontal stripes. The bottom is stitched together, and has a colourful border. A thin white *chadar* is worn over the *fanek*, called the *in-na-phi*. In winters a short tight fitting jacket of satin, black, blue, or green velvet may be worn. Girls below the age of puberty have the upper part of the body bare, wearing only a *fanek* round the waist.

There are festive dresses for occasions like sports (boating and wrestling), and at dances or religious festivals women wear a very gay costume consisting of a small black velvet cap trimmed with pearls, a close fitting jacket of black cloth or velvet with gold trimming on the sleeves, a white cloth wound lightly round the waist and upto breasts, and a green or red petticoat with a band of sequin ornamentation at the bottom of it. The costume, complete with decoration and ornaments, is very gay, and due to its prohibitive cost it is often obtained on hire.

Ornaments consist mainly of bracelets, necklaces, and earrings. Ankle and toe ornaments are not worn. The women wear a small gold pin in each nostril. As in dress, there were restrictions on the use of ornaments, and permission to wear ones of gold had to be obtained from the Raja, so far as ordinary classes were concerned. Men as well as women wore earrings, generally a thin plating of gold over lac. Women of the upper classes wore necklaces, quite often of pure unalloyed gold.

The weapons used by the Meitheis were the *dao*, the dart (*aramba*), and a catapult, which replaced the bow, firing pellets of hardened clay. Shields made of buffalo hide and studded by brass knobs, were carried mainly on ceremonial occasions. The *dao* was a blade from one to two feet in length, firmly fixed in a wooden or metal handle. The dart (*arama*) consisted of a heavy pointed piece of iron, attached to a bamboo rod and twelve long quills of peacock feathers. The handle was used to fling the iron piece with unerring accuracy. Gunpowder was known to the Meitheis, and they could make rough matchlocks and breechloading guns.

### The Santhals

The Santhals were originally residents of the Santhal parganas of Bihar. They later migrated to Assam and settled in the northern part of the Goalpara district at the foot of the Bhutan Hills.

The Santhals are a dark complexioned race, strong and healthy. They are simple in their habits, and peace loving. They dress scantily. The men wear a dhoti, and wrap their heads with a towel in the form of a pugree. Often the lower limbs are covered by a variety of loin cloth only.

The women wear a saree almost in the same manner as Bengali women, and a blouse. The ornaments are few, and are usually of silver.

The Santhals are very good archers, and are always equipped with a bow. With them, the bow has almost a sacramental significance. When a child is born, his umbilical cord is cut by a steel arrow, which is then laid by the side of the infant for five days. The initiation of the grown up child into the use of the bow ■ an important and significant occasion. In marriage the women give a display with the bow, and when a man dies all his bows and arrows are burnt in the funeral pyre. So is the case with a woman, except that in her case only one of her bows and one arrow are burnt with her body.

## Domestic Life

Most of the tribal races were agriculturists, and the little industry they had, existed mostly as cottage industry. Since most of the tribes lived in the hills, and forests were plentiful, favourite pastime was hunting. The waters of the rivers and lakes provided fishing. Thus these two became the main recreations of the tribal races, and incidentally yield much needed food.

The houses and homesteads were necessarily crude; often made of split bamboo and thatched grass. The houses were mostly ill-ventilated, with only few doors and fewer windows, the fireplace being an important item in the house. The villages were compact and well protected and sheltered, and often built near a source of water. Furniture used to be sparse and crude.

Food consisted mainly of rice and a number of varieties of meat, some vegetables, and delicacies like bamboo shoots. The favourite drink was brewed beer made of rice, and liquor, though sometimes drunk, was not so popular.

Outdoor games predominated among the tribes, which is to be expected in the environment in which they lived, but draughts and such other indoor games were also popular. Dancing was universal, and picturesquely striking.

The domestic life of the Assam tribes may conveniently be considered under the following main heads :

- (i) Pursuits and Occupations,



- (ii) Home Life, and
- (iii) Recreations and Amusements.

### **(A) PURSUITS AND OCCUPATIONS**

#### **Agriculture**

Agriculture is the mainstay of the Nagas, the object being to provide enough food for themselves rather than make any profit out of it. There are two kinds of cultivation—the jhum and the terraced.

Jhuming means clearing the land and growing crop on it for two years successively, after which it is allowed to remain fallow for five to fifteen years, according to the area of the land. The process of jhum cultivation is very laborious. Having selected the spot, the Naga cultivator must clear it of thick jungle. This involves strenuous work. The cultivator may have to work in the strong sun in the day, and sleep in the field at night, particularly when it is far removed from his home. There is often no water available to drink, and so he must endure thirst. After the jungle is cut, it is left to dry; and when this is done, it is set fire to at a particular time. The burnt soil is then raked up with hoes, and mixed with the ashes. The seed is scattered on this. The unburnt trunks of trees are placed along the boundary to catch the rainwater coming down the hill side. The field has to be constantly protected from birds and wild beasts, and specially from the rats, which cause much damage. It has to be weeded frequently. Even if the crop thus matures, there is the risk of its being destroyed by very strong winds, which not only lay the crop low, but wrench the grain from the sheaves and carry it away. When this happens, all that the poor cultivator can do is to bemoan sadly, 'God is carrying away the crop!'. After having cultivated the land for two years, the family must subsist on the produce for a number of years, for the land is left fallow, and returns to forest, after which the same process is repeated.

Terraced cultivation is by digging and making terraces on the hill sides. These terraces are from two to twenty feet

broad and lined by the stones dug out from the soil while preparing them, in order to retain the rainwater or water from a stream, for irrigation purposes. The terraces get water either from those above it, for which purpose the flow is regulated, or by tapping some stream. Large streams may be exploited by all, but on the smaller ones, the first man who digs the channel from it gets a priority right. Since irrigation of the terraced hill sides is of primary importance, there are complicated regulations and laws governing the right to water, and disputes are frequent. Manure, in the form of cow dung is applied to the terraced fields. The seeds of paddy are sown thickly on a bit of land in March-April, and the seedling are transplanted in June in ones or twos. The harvest is ready by the end of October, and reaped early in November. For dry rice, logs are placed along the hill sides at regular intervals. The grain is separated from the husk by trampling it under the feet, and subsequently it is further dried and pounded.

The main crop is rice, which is of a coarse variety, though some finer varieties are also cultivated in the valleys. The cold weather crops are chillies, pumpkins, tobacco, ginger, Job's tears, a kind of grass with seeds, millet and cotton. To some little extent maize, beans, oil-seeds, cucumbers, spinach, mustard and a variety of jute for making coarse cloth are also grown.

The Tangkhuls grow potato also as a winter crop, apart from the others like maize, pumpkins, tobacco, ginger and so forth. When crops are not sufficient, the wild yam relieves the situation to some extent. Nature has been kind in making this wild root grow plentifully, and it often keeps starvation off from the poorer Nagas.

The trees remain the property of those who tend them, especially those like timber, which are of value for the wood. Fields are demarcated by large stones.

The domestic animals of the Angami Nagas are mainly mithans and cows. The mithans are usually black or black

and yellow. These yield very good milk and beef. Cows are reared mainly for meat. They are lodged in a cow-shed near the house, and taken out to graze by a cowherd who gets paid for his labour in terms of paddy. If one beast kills another in a fight, the flesh of the two is divided according to custom between the owners. Pigs and dogs are also kept, and the meat of the latter is considered a great delicacy, though tamed dogs are not killed.

Of the Khasis, too, most are engaged in agriculture. Some of them are occupied in bee-keeping and rearing cattle. A considerable number are labourers employed in road and building construction, or as porters in carrying potatoes, rice, salt and so forth, and a few are domestic servants.

The Khasi agricultural land is of four types—forest land, wet paddy land, high grassland and homestead land. The forest land is cleared by the jhuming process, an account of which has already been given. The wet paddy land is found at the foot of the valleys. The land is divided into compartments by making high *mends*, and the soil is made into a thick paste by driving cattle repeatedly across it. The paddy is not transplanted as by the Nagas, but broadcast on the prepared soil. According to Khasi tradition the use of the sickle is prohibited. So they pull out the ear by hand. In cultivating the high land the hoe is used for digging up the soil and leaving it exposed for about two months. When dry the sods are piled up and set fire to, reducing them to ashes, which are spread all over the field and mixed (in cases other than paddy cultivation) with manure. The seed is then sown. Homestead land, being closer to the home is plentifully manured, and since more care can be given to it, better crop is produced.

The main crops are rice, potatoes, sweet potatoes, yams, maize, millets, and some turmeric, ginger, sesamum and sugar-cane. The vegetables grown are pumpkins, gourds, egg-plants and chillies, and fruit trees like oranges, limes, and pineapples are cultivated. Other products are the *pan* (betel), grown mainly on the southern hills, bay-leaf, and lac, cultivated by

the Bhois and Lyingams. The Khasi orange is delicious, and has a good market. The bay-leaf is exported.

The Garos, too, are mainly agriculturists, and most of their time and energy are spent in tending the fields. The Garo soil is rich. The system of cultivation is, as usual, the jhum. When the land is ready, holes are made at regular intervals and a few seed planted in each hole. Millets are sown by broadcasting. A large number of crops are sown in the same field. Paddy is harvested by grasping the ears and forcing out the grain, as is the practice among the Khasis. The harvester carries two baskets. In one the grain for consumption is stored, and in the other the finer grain which will be used for seed.

The agricultural implements are few and simple. These consist of the chopper, and a bamboo rake called the *jakeng-brak*, with five teeth slightly bent, to collect the dry roots and weeds for burning. The plough was not used previously, but later came into prominence.

The most important crop is paddy, though in some places millet takes its place. In the first year a number of other crops are sown along with rice or millets, such as maize, chillies, melons, pumpkins and Job's tears. A little of yams, sweet potato, ginger and indigo is also grown. In the second year, however, only rice is planted. Next to rice, the most important crop is cotton, which is found in most parts of the Garo Hills, and the greater portion of which is exported to Germany.

Although the Garos consider that lac is unlucky and any of it existing nearby will cause their paddy crop to fail, a lot of it is cultivated because it is a source of considerable profit. The lac insect thrives well on four kinds of plants, including *arhar*, but only the *arhar* plant is grown by the Garos. The lac is collected twice a year, some of it being kept apart for seed.

The Mikirs, too, are mainly agriculturists, moving from place to place, because after the fertility of one area where cul-

tivation has been carried out is exhausted, another is taken up. The process of jhuming is used by them as well.

The main crops are rice, sown in the beginning of the rainy season and reaped in winter, and cotton, also likewise grown in the beginning of the rainy season, and gathered in the cold weather. Apart from these, there are other minor crops like castor oil, maize, tumeric, yams, red pepper, brinjals ginger and lac grown on the branches of the *arhar* plant.

Unlike others, the land of the Kachari tribes does not lack irrigation. for there are numerous streams issuing from the lower spurs of Bhutan Hills which are harnessed for purposes of irrigation. In this the Kacharis are very well organised, and whenever there is shortage of rainfall, the village headman collects the people of the village and makes them work jointly in digging channels from the nearest river. Thus without outside help, they can ensure their own irrigation in times of need.

The spirit of joint effort is observed in other jobs too, as for example, in harvesting the crop. In this the neighbours help, without any payment. The wife of the owner of the field provides all engaged in work with appetising meals, including the favourite rice beer. Thus each man's field is harvested by turns without any trouble or expense—a system of mutual co-operation which has much to commend itself.

The main crops are rice, pulse, cotton, sugar-cane, and tobacco, rice being by far the most popular. Apart from being engaged in cultivating the fields, the Kacharis are engaged in working on tea estates. It is usual for one or two boys in the family to take up work on one of the tea estates in Upper Assam, where they are in great demand. The other brothers carry on the local cultivation. Thus the family income is augmented and makes for prosperity.

For the Meitheis of Manipur also agriculture is the main occupation. Rice is grown abundance because of there being

plentiful water for irrigation. The Meltheis use a kind of plough driven by a buffalo by means of a string passing through his nose, or sometimes by two yoked bullocks. There are various stages in the growing of rice. The rice fields are prepared as early as February. In May the dry paddy seed is cast on the ground. When the rains come, which is in June, the fields are ploughed a number of times till the soil is thick and slushy, and sprouted seeds of paddy are cast on the surface. Later in the rainy season transplantation is done. The seed for transplantation are prepared near the plot. Transplanted paddy is of course the best, and gives the largest yield. The operations of harvesting, threshing, and winnowing, are similar to those carried out by the Indian cultivator.

Other crops are tobacco, sugar-cane, onions, indigo, mustard, opium and pulses. There are a variety of vegetables, such as peas, potatoes, greens, cabbages, carrots, radishes, beetroots and turnips. Of pulses there are two kinds, *kesar* and *moong*. Wheat is grown in winter, but in small quantities. There are many varieties of fruit trees such as plantains, pine-apples, mangoes, apples, strawberry, oranges, limes, pomegranates, guavas, jackfruit and plums.

The Santhals are agriculturists, but of the primitive kind. They grow only Sali paddy, sown in the rains and reaped in winter. A number of them work as labourers.

### Industry

The foremost industry of the Naga tribes is weaving. Cotton is plentifully grown in the villages on the lower hill sides. The cotton is seeded by a small wooden machine which is manufactured internally by the Kacha Nagas. The spindle which spins out the seeded cotton is called the *themvu*, and the loom on which the cloth is woven is a simple kind of tension loom. The woman who weaves the cloth sits on a low stool, keeping the wrap tight by means of a leather strap against which she leans, the end of the strap being fastened to the back

bar of the loom. The shuttle is passed over and under the warp, and the woof pushed in by a bit of wood.

Blacksmiths in large number make implements like spear-heads, butts, *daos*, axes, spades, knives, sickles and so forth. Old weapons are also sharpened and 'polished by tempering with water mixed with salt, chillies, and bamboo pickle. This on evaporation, leaves a sediment. Heat is applied again, the process being repeated till a shine and sharpness are obtained, Brass ear-rings are also made from brass wire.

Earthen pots are made in certain villages of the Angami like those of Viswema and Khuzama, and in Nungbi by the Hundung clan of the Manipuri Nagas. The process is a manual one, and simple in performance. The potter shapes the pots from a lump of clay coiled round a bamboo, which replaces for him the usual potter's wheel. The vessels are then baked in a furnace outside the village. While being devoid of elegance and ornamentation, the pots made are strong and serviceable.

Other industries are basket-making, making shields from hides, woodwork and wood carving, making-dolls, musical instruments like the trumpet or flute for which wood is used, or the Jew's harp from bamboo, and small articles like collars, gaiters, armlets, headbands of plaited cane, drinking cups of buffalo horn, and plates of gourds. Salt-making is another industry. Naga salt is believed to have a medicinal property, and the Nagas nibble on a lump of it while drinking their favourite rice beer. The salt is made by pouring brine into small earthenware pots, where it hardens. Evaporation takes place over ordinary fire. Salt-making is obviously an occupation looked upon with seriousness and reverence. The Tangkul Naga who is about to make salt remains chaste on the preceding night, and speaks to no one the next morning till the fire which will evaporate the brine is lit.

The Khasis have very few industries, and manufacture only minor articles. There is iron smelting and cotton and

silk spinning. The iron ore is extracted from the soft boulder rocks. Cotton cloth is made specially in the region of the Jaintia Hills. Articles of dress like sleeveless coats, loin cloths and so forth, are made from this cloth. Dyes are used, especially the dark blue and black ones, obtained from the leaf of a plant which is grown in the Khasi homestead gardens. A red dye is also obtained from the mixture of the dry bark of two shrubs. Silk cloth, which is usually white alternating with a colour like red, mauve or brown, is made in some of the villages of the Jaintia Hills.

Pottery is another item of manufacture. The potter uses grey or dark blue clay, and mixes them together in a fixed proportion. The clay is beaten out on a hide or a wooden block, and the pots are fashioned, generally by women, by hand. They are then sun-dried and fired, and painted black with the infusion of a bark. Flower pots and ordinary water pots are thus made.

The requirements of the Garos are very few, and being mainly engaged in agriculture, they have little to contribute to industry. There is some trade in timber, which is floated down the river from Someawari to Baghmara, and sold to agents at Mymensingh. Similarly bamboos are cut and sent in rafts, and some boats are also made. There is a little petty trading in white beads, *daos*, swords and cloth. Small jobs and repairs are done by ironsmiths, and there is a crude type of loom in almost every household to supply to family needs. A few carpenters are to be found in Tura.

A kind of dark blue or red cotton cloth woven by the Garos is known as the *kancha*. It is made in three pieces of white, blue and red strips. A crude bedding and blanket of bark called a *sinpak* was made by the Garo forefathers. A straight branch of the tree was cut and the covering taken off. The inside was then split open and peeled off, and only the inner layers were used. The pith was thoroughly pounded by mallets till it was a thick mass of fibres. The moisture was wrung out, and the pallet spread in the sun to dry.



Fishing lines and fishing nets are also manufactured by the Garos from the fibre of the *kilkra* tree.

The Mikirs have few manufactures. Weaving is done on crude wooden looms, silk from cocoons is woven into coarse fabrics, especially the blanket used in winter which the Mikirs call *bor-kapor*. The cloths are dyed with indigo, which they get from a plant having two varieties, called the *boothee* and *boojee*. These plants are grown in a patch near almost every house. The red dye is also used.

Blacksmiths make *dozs* and many varieties of knives, needles and fishing-hooks. Gold and silver ornaments are also made. Pottery is made in the same way as by the Khasis, i.e. by hand, without the use of the potter's wheel. Now, gradually more and more dependence is being placed on articles from outside, which have replaced those of indigenous make.

The chief industry of the Kacharis is the rearing of silk-worms for silk. The loom used for weaving the silk cloth is simple and can be made locally in the village. It is set up on the shady side of the home and worked by women who are extremely industrious, and thus make a substantial contribution to the family income. The silk cloth is called *ert*. It is very strong and durable, apart from being warm.

The Meitheids do a lot of weaving, and almost every housewife weaves all the cloth required by the family, at home. The Lois also make silk cloth. Leather tanning is a favourite industry and the quality of the tanned leather is very good. Amongst jewellery, rings bracelets and necklets are chiefly made. *Dags*, spears and arrowheads are made of iron. The Meitheids are expert in carpentry and woodwork. Turning in wood and ivory is commonly practised. Making locks of a fairly serviceable kind, silvering glass, electro-plating and minor repair work are other minor pursuits. Salt-making and iron-smelting are also largely practised.

**(B) HOME LIFE****The Village**

The villages of the Angami Nagas are generally situated on the ridge of some spur. In the old days they were strongly fortified with stockades, deep ditches and stone walls containing openings for muskets, and solid wooden gateways on the approach road to the village, which could be fastened and barricaded. There were also deep pitfalls containing sharp pointed bamboo stakes and covered with light earth, so that the unwary trespasser would drop inside and get wounded. The pitfalls, stockades and other such measures, have now been abandoned, and only their ruins remain to point out that they existed.

The Khasi village is built a little below the top of the hill and not on the summit. The houses are grouped close together. The higher land is used for potato cultivation. A number of pigs keep roaming about. There are groves nearby, and it is an offence to cut a tree from them except for performing funeral ceremonies. Thus the Khasis are conscious of the importance of trees.

The Garos do not construct their villages high up on hill slopes, but in valleys or depressions, close to running water. They plant groves of jack fruit trees near their villages. In the middle of the village there is an open space in which religious ceremonies are conducted, and even dead bodies cremated. In one corner of the village are small huts which constitute the village granary. The paddy is placed in a large basket made of bamboo strips which takes up most of the space. Bunches of corn and millets are suspended from the roof of the granary.

The Kachari villages are compact, with the houses clustered together. There are few trees. Each house has its own granary and outhouses, and all these are encompassed by a ditch and a fence of jungle grass or bamboo splits for security from outside intruders as well as to prevent the fowls, ducks, goats,

pigs and domestic cattle from straying into the fields and damaging the crops.

The villages of the Meitheis are situated often by the side of a river so as to be near a source of water. The houses are grouped together, each in its own enclosure.

The Santhal villages are situated in the plains. There are houses on both sides of street. They are very particular about cleanliness, and take good care to keep their villages clean, a task in which the pigs and dogs contribute by consuming much of the refuse ! The chief's house occupies a central position in the village, and is close to the Majisthan which is an important place, for taxes are collected there and legal disputes settled. It consists of a prominent raised mud mound over which a neatly thatched room is built.

### **The House**

The Naga houses are built all over the village in a disorganised fashion and facing this way and that at every angle, though generally they face the east so as to catch the sun. Each house has a small open space in front of it for growing a little maize or mustard, or a kitchen garden. The house is single storied, the bare earth forming the flooring. The gables are sometimes equipped with heavy carved beams, and the eaves almost touch the ground to protect the roof from the strong winds. The house is made by setting up eight posts, usually smoothed out tree trunks, which are notched at the top and secured by cane thongs. On this is built a trellis of split bamboos crossing one another at right angles and tied with cane thongs. The roof, which is built on this structure, is either of plain grass used for thatching, or of boards. The sides and back walls are of bamboo matting, but often dry masonry is used upto a height of three feet or so. The front wall is of large wooden boards, and the inner partitions of small planks, on some of which there are carvings of figures of men or animals. The planks are dug into the ground at their base, and secured by cross pieces formed of small beams on each side tied

with cane thongs and supported on the side beams connecting the corner posts.

There are three distinct divisions in the house. The front room, which is so big that it occupies half the length of the entire house, is meant for storing paddy, and contains all the implements and articles necessary for pounding it. The second compartment has the hearth, and a stone platform on which a pot can be placed for cooking, over the fire. Near the fireplace there are two planks about two feet above the ground, which serve as beds. Behind the room containing the fireplace, there is a long narrow room which stores the liquor inside a hollow tree trunk with three legs of wood. There is a door of solid wood in front of the house, sometimes with cross-bars behind, and a bamboo door behind, opening out of the narrow room at the back. In front, the projecting eaves also form a porch where wood is stored, or a fire can be lit in winter, round which the people sit and warm themselves. Sometimes half of this porch is fenced to make a shed for cattle, or to provide additional living room. Animals and birds of various kinds live in the house along with the owners—cows, pigs, dogs, hens and so forth. Quite often the gables of the house are crowned by wooden horns placed across each other. Heads of animals killed in hunting, are relics of prominent feasts are also displayed.

The family is usually a small one, with only two or three children. Sometimes two families occupy the house after a separate hearth and fenced off space has been provided. Usually the second family is of a *newly* married son who is unable to build a house of his own.

The fire always burns in the fireplace. It is not allowed to go out, and if it by some chance does, it is re-lit immediately. There is no chimney, and the smoke gets out of the small window in the house. The old method of kindling the fire was by a firestick, but now of course the match stick has replaced it. Utensils consisting of earthen pots for cooking, vats, troughs and jars used for fermenting liquor and gourds for carrying it, are used by the Naga household. There are cups and drinking

vessels of bamboo, mithan horns for drinking, wooden spoons and platters. As a consequence of contact with the outside world, the old type of vessels have yielded place to the usual plates, spoons, tumblers and so forth. Large baskets called *jappas*, narrow at the bottom and widening at the mouth are used for keeping clothes. Water is carried in narrow-necked earthen jars, but the hollow bamboo is also largely used.

Young unmarried men have separate quarters in the shape of dormitories, called *Morungs*. These are recreation clubs, centres of education art and discipline, and ceremonies are frequently held in them. Great wooden drums were placed here which used to summon people for war or to announce a festival. Representations of animals and trophies too are hung here.

The houses of the Khasia are clean and tidy, but with very low roofs, and with only one small window opening on one side. The roof is thatched, and the walls are of stone on a raised plinth. The construction is oval shaped, and there are rooms, a porch, a room in the centre and a retiring room. As in Naga houses a fire always burns in the stone hearth, the firewood being placed to dry on a frame above the hearth. Fuel, and other miscellaneous articles are stacked in the porch, while the pigs and calves are kept in a small structure outside.

In front of the house there is a small space open towards the village street and fenced on two sides. The Synteng houses are plastered with red earth and cow-dung. The well-to-do have modern houses, with iron roofs, chimneys, and glass windows and doors. They use muslin curtains, and furniture of European style and taste.

The houses of the Pnar-Wars have roofs of palm leaves, and eaves almost touching the ground. The walls are of bamboos. In some tribes there are separate bachelor quarters similar to the Naga *morungs*. The War houses are almost similar to those of the Pnar-Wars, except that while the former have no plinth, the War houses rest on a platform which projects out towards the hill sides. The Bhoi and Lyngam houses are generally built on

high platforms of bamboos, often thirty to forty feet in length. They have platforms also for drying paddy, spreading chillies, or resting after a day's work. A notched pole has to be climbed before one can enter a Bhoi house.

The Khasis have various ceremonies which attend the building of a house. The Bhois sacrifice a he-goat and a fowl to the family deity when they build a house. When the Khasi house is built, three pieces of dried fish are tied to the ridge pole, and the owner tries to pull them down. Or a pig is killed and a portion of the flesh attached to the pole. The Syntenga worship Vishvakarma, the architect Hindu god along with their own. They also plaster the walls with mud. In Nongstoin the custom is to worship the local deity by nailing branches of the Khasi oak, jaw bones of cattle, and feathers of fowls, to the principal post of the house. On this occasion the ladies of the Siem family perform a ceremonial dance before a large post of oak.

Up to date Khasis have modern furniture, including chairs, tables and so forth. But in the days of the past traditional items found place in the house. There was a special kind of water-pot made from hollow gourd, and the Khasi tribal drank from a bamboo cylinder. Ordinary water-pots and dishes were made of brass. The cooking pot in the poor houses was of earthenware. Brass and wooden spoons were used. The well-to-do class have wooden beds and mats, but the ordinary cultivator sleeps on pieces of plaited bamboo spread on the floor. In the old days rain shields were used in place of umbrellas. Cane or bamboo baskets of conical shape were used for carrying goods. Betel leaves were stored in a bamboo tube, and betel-nuts in a metal box, sometimes of silver. The ordinary Indian hubble-bubble was popular. Some tribes, like the Bhois and Lyingams used leaf-plates for eating. The Lyingams also made rough quilts from the bark of trees.

The Garo houses are exceedingly long, with doors at each end, but no windows. There are three principal parts. In the front is a room with the bare earth for the floor. The pestle and mortar are kept in this room, along with dry firewood for

burning, miscellaneous household articles, and cattle. Behind this, with a slightly raised plinth, there is the main living room, which takes up most of the built up area. Nearest the front door there is the place where sacrifices are offered. In the middle portion the pots of liquor are stored, and towards the back of the room there is the hearth. Above the fireplace there is a platform of bamboo matting built on four posts, for keeping cooking pots and other household utensils. After the fireplace there is the portion where the unmarried girls of the household sleep on the floor. When one of them is married, a space is partitioned off for the couple. The third room, which opens into a small veranda, is the sleeping apartment of the owner of the house and his wife. At one side of this is a latrine. Sometimes there is a small platform where the family can sit and enjoy the fresh air. In every village there is the bachelor-house which is of large size and built on a high platform, to reach which one has to climb a sort of rude staircase made of notched logs of wood. The main posts of these bachelor houses are carved and coloured, and ornamented with figures of human beings, animals, fruits and vegetables. Because cultivation requires the constant presence of the farmer on the field, there is a tendency to have two houses, one in the village and one near the field. The field houses are built high up in trees to ensure safety from elephants and other wild beasts. They are reached by a bamboo ladder.

The Garos too have big feasts and ceremonies to celebrate building of a house. In these ceremonies the assembled guests dance, and sing a chorus.

The furniture in a Garo house is of a plain and simple kind. A raised platform serves for the table, and a block of wood for a chair. There are no wooden tables of the conventional type. The valuables are contained in baskets or bundles which are hung from the roof of the house. The cooking pots are of earthenware, and are sometimes home made by the women of the house. A scooped tree trunk and a heavy pole do for pestle and mortar. Trays are of flat bamboo work, and there are bamboo vessels for drinking, and bamboo spoons. For plates plaintain leaves are used,

Liquor is brewed in a big pot and is collected in a gourd. Water is also carried in these gourds. The baskets are flat bottomed, not conical as the Khasis baskets are. Cotton is carried in a cylindrical basket. For an umbrella the Garo uses a large cane leaf which can be folded up like a fan.

The Mikirs house has a front veranda, and also one ■ the back, and unroofed platforms (*chabutras*), at either extreme. Lengthwise, there are four main divisions consisting of two main rooms known as *kut* and *kam*, a passage which can be divided into compartments for sleeping on the right, and another one on the left for keeping fowls and goats at night. The *kut* has a fireplace at the back, the sleeping place for the family in the middle, and room for storing paddy in the front. The *kam* has two fireplaces. On the right side of the front veranda is the place for storing wood. For guests there is a separate roofed accommodation in the form of an L in front of the house, open towards it, but separate, and reached by a ladder. There is a pig-sty and a small fenced yard. The house is built on posts with a raised floor. The super-structure is of slit bamboo, thatched with *san*-grass.

The Mikirs have little furniture. A raised platform serves as the bed, a block of wood as a stool. Baskets of bamboo cane are used to store household goods and other articles.

The houses of the Kacharis are one storied, with walls of split bamboo and thatched roofs secured by cane. There are two rooms, one serving the purpose of a dining room and the other of a bedroom.

The furniture and other equipment of the Kachari house is the usual one found in other houses of the Assam tribes. There are many varieties of earthenware vessels, mostly necessitated by the preparation and consumption of the favourite Kachari rice beer—the *Zu*.

The houses of the Meitheis of Manipur are constructed of posts and beams of wood (bamboo in the case of the poorer classes). The walls are of reeds, plastered with a paste of mud and cow-dung, while the roofs are thatched with grass.



The houses face east, and have an open veranda running right across the front in which the family sit and relax, and carry out odd jobs. The head of the family has a honoured place on the south side of the veranda, and a mat or a piece of cloth is always spread for his comfort. Cooking is done inside the house.

The rooms are without partition, and the girls sleep together on the north side, while the head of the family has a small cubicle screened off by mats. The only ventilation is the two doors, one of which opens into the veranda and the other is towards the north of the house. There are no windows or chimneys. In the fireplace, which is on the north-west side, dried reed jungle is burnt.

Brick houses are on the increase, and the temples and natch ghars are of strong, wide, and thin bricks, with massive wooden beams.

The bed used in the Manipuri household is large and ornate. The family belongings are kept in a huge wooden chest with an iron lock. Then there are the usual vessels for eating and drinking which are of stone or earthenware. The tools used by the man, if he follows an avocation, are also kept in the wooden chest. The cooking pots used by the Meitheis are of brass, copper or bell-metal. The *dao* is a useful implement for odd jobs. The houses of the richer classes contain western style chairs, tables and stools.

### Food and Drink

Although rice is the Naga's principal food they also consume a lot of meat of all kinds. The cat, however, is not eaten, and is in fact treated with respect. The Tangkhuls have a saying that a man who kills a cat will become dumb. The flesh of other animals like elephants, dogs, cows, buffaloes, and even pythons, locusts and so forth, is eaten ; but pork and beef are preferred. The flesh of dogs used to be considered a great delicacy. Describing the favourite dish of the old time Naga tribes of Manipur, Mr. Hodson says, 'A young hungry puppy is

selected and given as much rice to eat as he can hold, till at least he drops into sleep. He is knocked on the head, his feet tied together on a pole, and roasted in a fire, and after but a very few minutes taken out, cut open, and the rice extracted in perfect condition for immediate consumption.\*

The Angami Nagas have similar food habits as the other Nagas have, but the flesh of the he-goat is prohibited for their women, lest the lecherous quality of the goat is acquired while eating it, for it is believed that the natures of the animals whose flesh is eaten, go to the eaters. The flesh of tigers and leopards may not be eaten by women, but men are allowed to eat it. However, it must be cooked in the porch outside, and is kept away from the hearths and the women's beds. Chillies are greatly liked, and bamboo shoots are a favourite. Vegetables and roots (yams) are also cooked, the former along with the meat. There are three meals, the early morning one, the midday meals, and the one in the evening. But snacks are taken in between.

Rice beer (Zu) is the most favourite drink, of which there are many varieties. Distilled liquor, called *zuharo* is made in a few villages, particularly Khonoma. Each family brews its own rice beer because its consumption is enormous, and it is preferred to all kinds of drinks. Before drinking, an offering is made by dipping a finger in the cup and touching the forehead with it, or pouring a little of the drink on floor.

The Khasis take two meals a day, one in the morning and the other in the evening, but those who work as labourers in fields take an extra midday meal of boiled rice which they carry with them. They are fond of meat, especially pork and beef, though the Syntengs abstain from the latter. Unlike other tribes, such as Nagas, Garos and Kukis, they do not eat dog's meat. There is a Khasi folk tale which brings out the friendliness of the dog with man. It is said that there was a certain market at a place called Luri-Lura in the Bhoi country where all the beasts went to sell their wares. The dog also went

\* T. C. Hodson, *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*, Macmillan, 1911.

there selling rotten peas, but no one would buy them because they stank, and when he tried to persuade them to do so, they trampled on his peas. The dog complained to the other powerful beasts and also to the tiger who was the controller of the market, but they paid no heed and instead threatened to fine him for selling the rotten stuff. The dog then appealed to the man, who promised to help him, and the two began to live together. The dog was of use to the man in tracking down other animals because he could smell the odour of rotten peas from their feet, which had trampled them !

Though the meat of the dog is thus prohibited, the Khasis eat the flesh of almost all wild animals, as well as of rats, tadpoles, green frogs, a kind of monkey (*u shrih*) and even having caterpillars ! They also use a kind of reddish flour made of the bark of the sago palm tree.

For drink, the Khasis use rice beer made from rice or millets and the root of a plant. Rice beer made by fermentation of rice is also used in religious ceremonies. The practice of distilling and consuming spirit is also on the increase.

All kinds of meat are eaten by the Garos—goats, pigs, fowls, ducks, dogs, cats, cows and buffaloes. Even snakes, lizards, and flying white ants are eaten. Dried fish and venison or beef is considered very delicious. Rice, of course is the staple food, as for other tribes. Among vegetables, bamboo shoots is the favourite.

The cooking pots are made of clay, but a popular way of cooking is to cut pieces of bamboo and fill them with the required amount of rice and water. These are propped upright, and a fire made around them, which heats up the bamboos and boils the rice inside. When the rice is cooked the bamboos are split.

There are three meals in the day, and the Garo carries his food with him when he is out. Before eating, a few grains of rice offered to the gods and a little liquor poured out as libation.

The favourite drink is liquor prepared from rice, maize, or Job's tears. The best liquor is brewed from sweet rice. The liquor is always brewed, never distilled. A kind of drink called *wanti* is made from a number of herbs and fruits mixed with sugar-cane and rice flour.

For the Mikirs, too, the main food is rice. The meat is skewered and cooked in fire. The flesh of goats, pigs and fowls is eaten, but beef is prohibited. The chrysalis of the *eri* silk worm is considered a great delicacy. It is eaten either roasted or in the form of curry. Vegetables are eaten.

The Mikirs mostly eat from leaf-plates, though metal plates are also used. The men and women eat together. There are two main meals, one early in the morning and one in the evening. An offering of food is made to the gods before eating.

The favourite drink is rice beer, which is prepared in each house. Liquor is distilled from fermented rice, and stored in gourds for consumption. The Mikirs also use opium, and chew to bacco and betel-nuts.

The Kacharis eat all kinds of meat except beef. Their favourite delicacy is pork, and a large number of pigs are reared and bought and sold for this. Dried fish is another prized dish. This is the small fish left on the surface when the water has dried up. The fish is left to dry in the sun, and eaten when perfectly dry.

The rice beer (*Zu*), which is consumed in large quantity, is made of husked rice, jack-tree leaf, and a jungle plant, *betal*, all pounded together and mixed with water so as to form a paste which is dried in the sun, and then kept in earthenware vessels near the fireplace. These rice cakes are then powdered, mixed with boiled rice, and place over a slow fire for three or four days. Thereafter the concoction is diluted somewhat with water, and is ready for use. Another kind of liquor is the *phatika*, which resembles somewhat the crude country liquor known in other parts of India.

The Meitheis have different food habits. For one thing they consume milk, which is never a favourite with other Assam tribes whom we have considered. They also abstain from alcohol, which too is unusual. Meat is generally not eaten, except for fish. Rice forms the staple food. It is cooked in earthenware pots, or as among the Garos, inside hollow bamboo pieces.

Tobacco is chewed in betels which are a favourite, but opium or other intoxicating drugs are not taken. Smoking has also gained many adherents.

Of the Santhals too, rice is the staple food. The quantity of rice a Santhal possesses is an index of his wealth. It is also the source of their rice beer.

### (C) RECREATIONS & AMUSEMENTS

#### **Hunting and Fishing :**

Hunting and fishing are the favourite diversions of the Nagas and incidentally they bring him the necessary food for consumption. Hunting weapons are spears and sharpened bamboos, and all the men of the village turn out for the hunt. Dogs are used for picking up the scent. Deer, serow, wild dogs and bears, are hunted in this manner. In the case of tigers, leopards and such game, shields are used in addition. Elephants were hunted by spears too, and this was not so difficult a job as appears, because of the large numbers of the hunting party. Later, however an ordinary gun with an iron barbed arrow was used.

Apart from hunting, the method of capturing animals with traps, snares, and pitfalls was also in vogue, as this made the task easier and provided the much needed meat. Pitfalls are large holes from six to sixteen feet deep, in which long pointed stakes are stuck, with a covering of thin branches, leaves and loose earth. Simple traps were used consisting of a long weighed down with heavy stones placed in such a way that when the animal ran, he displaced a stick which released the string by which the log was suspended. Smaller animals were trapped by this method. Snares and baits were also used.

The Kabuis have some interesting ways of setting snares. The game is driven through a long fence, at the opening of which a weighty spear is attached to an elastic creeper which acts as a spring, so that the animal rushes through and spears itself to death. Or they cut through the branch of a creeper for some of its thickness, and prepare a pitfall below it. When a monkey or such animal plays about on a creeper, it suddenly breaks away because of the burden, causing all its companions to be spiked inside the pitfall.

When the Angami Naga goes out for a hunt, he slices a twig on the ground or on a flat stone. The way in which the slices fall determines his luck in the chase. The dream he dreams before going out on the hunt, too, has its significance.

Fishing is practised with the rod. A piece of bent iron or brass wire serves as the hook, and the line is of fibre attached to the end of a stick. The bait consists of worms, grasshoppers or crickets. Basket traps and cast nets weighted with lead are used, and crabs, shrimps, prawns, and so forth, can be just removed from the water by hand.

Sometimes the Nagas catch their fish by 'poisoning' the water with a concoction made of roots, stems, leaves and the fruits of certain plants known to them. This juice mixed in the water stupefies the fish, and even kills them. The Lhotas consider it unlucky for women to fish in this way, but women take a prominent part among the Semas and the Angamis.

Hunting and fishing are also the favourite pastimes of the Khasis. They use the bow, and arrows with barbed iron heads for this purpose. Dogs on leashes accompany the Khasis to spot deer. Before beginning the chase the hunters break eggs to find out their chances of success. Before distributing the flesh, too, a worship is offered to the gods.

Snares, traps and other such devices are also employed by the Khasis in capturing animals. One device is to place a string on the jungle path, which when touched releases a bolt and spring and discharges a bambou arrow with great force,

Other devices like springbows, pitfalls, snares and cages are also employed.

The method of poisoning fish in order to capture them is employed by the Khasis as by the Nagas, although some of them use the fishing rod and line.

The ignorance of the Garos about the hunt marks them out from the other tribes. Although there is no lack of game, the thickness of their jungle makes swift movement, which is necessary for the chase, difficult. Sometimes however, the men of a village or two combine as a hunting party. They build a long V shaped stockade, leaving a few openings where men with spears are stationed. The animals are driven into the V, the women raising a loud hue and cry, and are speared to death as they try to escape through the gaps. Pigs and deer are killed in this manner.

Traps are also set, though there are not so many varieties as with the Nagas and the Khasis. A favourite kind is by bending down a branch to which a noose of cane or string is attached. As soon as an animal touches the bait, a catch which keeps the branch bent is released, jerking him up into the air and stunning him, so that capturing him remains an easy job.

Fishing, on the other hand, is a favourite occupation for the Garos is particularly fond of fish. The usual method of poisoning the water is resorted to, but there are several other novel ones also. One consists in building a strong dam (*nagli*) across a stream, leaving only a few outlets for the outflow of the water. Along these, tapering baskets of split bamboo are placed, so that when the water flows out, the fish are captured in it. Women fish with scoop shaped baskets which they plunge and withdraw, getting any fish which may have come into it during the period the baskets are immersed. Big bamboo cages suspended from trees are also used for capturing the fish. Fishing nets too are used.

Garos are also expert in spearing fish with spears resembling long bamboo fishing rods, having barbed heads of thin iron. The head comes loose when it finds a mark, and the fish is pulled out by an attached rope. They also harpoon the fresh

water shark with a barbed spear to which a rope is attached.

The Mikirs hunt with spears. The animals of prey are deer, wild boar, tortoise and the *iguana*. Dogs are used for following the scent. Traps are also set up. A spear discharges from a spring formed of a bent sapling. A rope stretched across the path releases the spring when the animal goes across.

Fishing is generally by bamboo baskets, as is the practice amongst the Garos and other tribes. A trap called *ru*, consisting of a bamboo basket placed along a dam is largely used.

The Kacharis ensnare the deer and the wild pig by the assistance of large nets. A number of people station themselves outside the net, armed with weapons. The net is gradually drawn close till the prey can be struck by a club or a *dao*.

Fishing is also done by similar methods, in this case the women taking a leading part. Two kinds of split bamboo baskets are used for the operation—the *zakhal* which is chiefly used by men, and the *pahla* by women. These baskets are fastened together by cane. The *zakhl* is a triangular basket open at one end and pointed at the other. This is attached to bamboo handle. The basket is put into the water by grasping the handle and the fish driven into the open end by flapping the water with the feet. After a few moments it is suddenly withdrawn; along with the fish which may have strayed into it. A number of women armed with this device line up in the shallow part of a stream, facing each other, and coming closer and closer. There is a lot of laughing and joking, fun and merriment while this goes on, so that the operation becomes almost a picnic. The *pahla* is like a circular hencoop of split bamboo, open at the top and bottom, the top opening just enough to admit a man's hand. This is placed in the water, imprisoning the fish, which is then removed by hand from the top. Eels, and similar fishes which conceal themselves in the mud, are speared and drawn out.

The Meitheis of Manipur are very good marksmen, and it is recorded that one of their kings, Pikhomba, could transfix a fish under water with an arrow from his bow. Despite this, they do not usually hunt animals, except to save men and



animals from the depredations of tigers and leopards. It is interesting to note that for this purpose they have a sort of organisation known as *ketrup*, meaning 'tiger club' (*ket*=tiger ; *rup*=club). As soon as news is received of such a beast ravaging the countryside, the persons forming this organisation proceed to the spot and surround the lairs of the tiger with nets. They fire rockets and explosives into the air, and the enraged tiger rushes into the nets, to be speared by the waiting men.

The Meitheis also indulge in a species of bee-hunting. They catch hold of a bee, and bind a thread round it. The bee thus guides them to its hive, and they extract the honeycomb from it.

There are many varieties of fish for food, and the Meitheis have various ways of catching them. Fishing baskets, traps, spears and nets are used. The women fish with a square net, hanging a pole in the centre. They dip this into the river, and raise it along with any fish which might be entrapped. Another way is to force them out of their sanctuary amidst the roots of the floating vegetation near islands where they collect in large numbers.

The Santhal's favourite occupation is hunting, in which he is an expert. If he learns of the presence of a hunting party in the neighbourhood, he will leave all work, and join it. The Dihri hunt takes place once a year in the month of February-March. The hunt is preceded by a small ceremony. The hunting priest called Dihri, from whom the hunt takes its name, offers a sacrifice to the spirit of the forest called *bonga*. He goes naked into the jungle and pricks his body all over with the thorn of a tree. He then draws a small circle on the ground with powdered rice, and smearing some grains of boiled rice with the blood which comes out from his body, puts them inside and paints the circle with vermillion. A little of this rice is offered to the forest spirits. If an animal is killed in the Dihri hunt, the flesh is distributed to all the particulars of that particular village.

#### Games :

Amongst indoor games the most popular one with the

Angami Nagas, is a form of draughts known as *terchuchu*, which means literally 'fighting-eating', because the pieces, which are bits of stone, 'fight' and 'eat' by jumping over each other. Gambling with cowries is also in vogue.

In outdoor sports there is the high jump, the long jump, and a kind of running jump in which the runner leaps over a stone, and starts running from there. High kicking, in which a mark is placed on a tree and raised higher and higher, is a favourite item, and putting, spear throwing, wrestling, mock fighting, spinning the peg-top, and so forth, are other games.

The Manipuri Nagas play the 'kang' game with a smooth and round seed of a jungle creeper, which fits into a small groove on which it can stand upright on the ground. The players, who are often girls, hop and flick the 'kang' down. The other game is draughts, which is called the game of 'tiger and men'.

Among outdoor games, the Manipuri Nagas have, apart from wrestling, jumping, whipping the peg top, tug-of-war—which is often in a ceremonial form, and moving on stilts.

The main sport of the Khasis is archery, which is the national game, and which they believe existed from the beginning of creation. It is said that the first Khasi woman born on earth had two sons whom she taught the art of archery, cautioning them never to lose their tempers while engaged in the game. The archery contests are held from January to May each year, and competitors are adjudged by umpires. In the beginning the umpire performs a kind of ceremony in which the aid of the primeval Khasi woman is invoked, and the conditions of the contest proclaimed while water is ceremoniously poured from a bamboo in front of the target every now and then. This goes on for about two hours, after which the contest begins. The games for children are peg-top spinning, and a kind of hop-Scotch known as *khyndat mala shito* or *ta tiet hile*. Bamboo climbing, in which a prize awaits the climber at the top, is another sport. Apart from these games there are wrestling, a kind of joust with

sticks, in which the combatants push and try to upset each other, long jump, high jump, flying kites, blind man's buff, and games of cowries and marbles.

The Garos do not have organised sports or archery of the kind the Khasis have. Their outdoor games are few. There is a kind of cock-fight in which two persons sit behind stones, facing each other and grasping a short bamboo. Each tries to pull on the stick and lift the other up, the one who succeeds being the winner. There is a form of free wrestling in which there are no binding rules. A game much like rounders is also played, which consists in one member racing, and the other trying to catch him. Besides these prominent games, there are a few which are mere variations of these, and a game resembling that of marbles played with a large round been called the *sue*.

The Mikirs have few amusements and games, but the villages used to have *deka* clubs which apart from assisting in agricultural operations, had evenings of cultural shows and activities in which dancing and singing and various ceremonies take place. These clubs were associations of youths from the ages of twelve to twenty, with a strong and effective organisation and regular office bearers. They would eat together and combine in carrying out ordinary tasks like fetching midday meals for its members from their houses. The clubs, which were useful institutions, went gradually into disuse.

The Meitheis of Manipur are greatly devoted to outdoor games and sport. A sort of hockey in which there are nine players on each side, is played by a curved bamboo stick, the game being concluded when either side scores an agreed number of goals.

Another favourite game is polo, for which the polo stick (the *kang hu*) consists of a long bamboo shaft with a head of hard wood, and the ball is of bamboo root.

Javelin throwing, putting the stone, high kicking, sword and spear play and so forth, are also in vogue. The boat race is

an important and picturesque event. A strange custom in these races is that the steersman of the losing boat becomes the slave of the steersman of the winning one, and he has to be paid a fine for release from the 'slavery'.

Many kinds of races are held, one of these, the foot race or *lanchel* (*lam*=distance; *chel*=run) being very popular. Wrestling is also a favourite sport. In this too a peculiar custom exists inasmuch as the victor leaps up into the air, alights on his left foot, and slaps his buttocks tightly. Thereby he makes known his superior skill, and thereafter salutes the Ruler who presides over the wrestling matches.

Another game is 'playing the *kang*'—which is the seed of a creeper, nearly circular, about an inch and a half in diameter and almost three fourths of an inch thick. It is pitched with an accuracy, with the help of an ivory disc by the middle finger of the right hand and the forefinger of the left. Another kind of contest is one in which men on one side and women on the other clutch the two ends of a green bamboo and try to pull each other down. This is analogous to tug-of-war.

#### Musical Instruments :

The Nagas have a variety of musical instruments, like the Jew's harp, gongs of bellmetal, fiddles, drums and so forth.

The Khasis do not have many musical instruments. There are many kinds of drums made of wood, guitars, violins played with a little wooden key, bows, or just strummed by the fingers, the Jew's harp made of bamboo, and a wooden pipe called the *tangmuri*. Though ordinary flutes are played, there is a special kind of bamboo flute known as the *ka sharati* which is played only at cremation ceremonies. There is an interesting tale about this in Khasi folk lore. A poor orphan of the name of U Manik Raitong, fed up with life, used to sit in his house and play mournfully on his flute. In the same village lived a queen whose husband would remain out of the house for long periods because of his duties. Once when the queen was alone, she heard the strains of U. Raitong's flute, and enamoured of them, went to the lad. But U. Raitong refused to admit her,

However the queen people through a chink in the wall and immediately got enamoured of him. The queen tried her level best to disport with the boy but failed. However, when the lad went out to plough she tried another device in which she was successful, and had her pleasure with him. A male child was born to her from U. Raitong, and when her husband came back after a long period he was surprised to see the child. The queen refused to disclose the name of the child's father, so the king called all the men in the State, each man holding a plantain in his hand. The king said 'To whosoever this child goes, he is the father'. But the child went to no one. Then the king asked if anyone was absent. On finding out that the orphan lad, U. Raitong had not come, he insisted on his presence. When the lad came, the child laughed and of himself went to him. U. Raitong was ordered to be burnt on a pyre. On hearing his sentence he desired that the pyre may be lit, and he would immolate himself in the flames. The lad bathed and dressed, and playing on his flute, walked backwards, and after going round the pyre thrice, threw himself on it. Before he did so he planted his flute on the earth. The queen, too, flung herself in the flames, and perished with U. Manik Raitong. When the bodies were burnt, a pool of water formed round the pyre, and from the flute a bamboo sprang up, whose leaves grew upside down. After this it became a custom to play the bamboo flute at funerals as a sign of mourning.

The Garos do not have many musical instruments. The few they have are the usual ones, like drums, wind instruments, metal gongs and cymbals. Of drum there are many varieties, some small, others large. Some kinds of drums have a strange superstition attached to them viz, they are not to be taken out of the owner's house, for if this is done some misfortune is sure to be caused. When these drums are made, a fowl is ceremoniously slaughtered on them. The wind instruments are trumpets and flutes, pipes and buffalo horns. The Jew's harp is carved out of bamboo. At one end there is a short string which is

tugged sharply while the harmonica is placed between the teeth.

The gongs act not only as musical instruments, but also as status symbols, and a man's status is often measured by the number in his possession. Gongs have a ceremonial use. After a man's death a hole is made in one of his metal gongs and placed close to his memorial post. The cymbals are generally shaped like two small brass cups, though there are other kinds also.

The musical instruments of the Mikirs are the bamboo flute, the fife, the drum, and a one-stringed fiddle. The flute is the *bansuri*, and the fiddle is a string made, from a creeper stretched across a hollow gourd. It is played with a bamboo bow with strong bamboo fibres for the strings.

The Meitheis have few musical instruments. There are many kinds of drums of various sizes and shapes. The wandering minstrels who are found singing in the villages, use a horn, and conchshells and castanets are carried by performers who accompany them. There are also stringed instruments like violins and a kind of *sarangi*. Cymbals also are used, and a kind of triangle with jingling bells.

### Dances

Apart from the ceremonial dancing, the Angami Nagas have a kind of war dance called *kedohah*, practised as a sport, in which a young man with spear and shield and a *dao*, leaps about uttering war cries. Leaping into the air and crossing and re-crossing the legs two or three times is also part of this dance.

The dance of the Manipuri Nagas are varied and picturesque. The Lophoopa men execute a kind of war dance to the sound of gongs, with that women plying them with liquor off and on. The Tangkhul girls dance separately by themselves. The Kabuis have various kinds of dances with a drum for accompaniment. The men carry *daos* or spears which they

twirl around, the girls wear gay coloured dresses and tinsel ornaments in the form of circlets round their heads. The boys and girls of the Quoireng tribe dance together hand in hand in large circles, changing formations swiftly, the men twirling their sticks or *daos*, and the girls keeping their hands close to their sides, moving the fingers, sometimes bending back and forth from their waists. The Marrings have a men's war dance, and another one in which both men and women perform in two lines, advancing and retreating alternately.

Dancing forms an important part of the festivities and the religious ceremonies of the Khasis. In the Nongkrem dance, which is performed in the interest of preservation of the crop, twenty-two men armed with swords, shields and chowries, participate. This is followed by a mammoth dance of unmarried girls and men, which is executed in front of the house of the priestess. The girls dance in the middle, making almost imperceptible movements, their hands held to their sides and their eyes demurely cast down. They wear silver or gold crowns, their hair knotted, and a long braid hanging down behind, wearing colourful dresses, and decked in all their finery and ornaments. The men dance outside the circle of girls to the tune of pipes, drums and cymbals, waving their chowries, and executing a rhythmical movement. There are also dances in which the men and the women dance separately, the men wearing plumes of black and white cock feathers, executing a sort of mock combat with sword and shield. Often the men hold aloft leafy branches while dancing. The women are brightly dressed, and sometimes dance bare-headed without the usual head dress or crown.

Dancing, which is often accompanied with drinking, is a very prominent feature of the Garo's recreation. Sometimes the men and women dance together, sometimes the women alone, to the accompaniment of buffalo horns, bamboo flutes and drums. The men dance with swords and shields uttering shouts of 'kai ! kai !' There is the ceremonial dance when the

headman wears the elbow ring. In this the priest leads, while the headman and his wife follow, and thereafter the privileged guests. They dance too and fro from the headman's house to the village square.

The women's dances generally represent some operation like the *kil-pua* dance which depicts the sowing of cotton seed, the *do 'kru-su'a* in which two women facing each other move as if two birds were pecking, and the *ambre-rurua* which is an interesting dance in which one woman imitates a tree violently shaken to drop the fruit from it, while the other synchronises her movement to her partner's to act as if she is picking the fruits which come down.

There is another dance which takes place out of doors. The women go round in a circle, surrounded by an outer circle of men. A woman taking part in the dance swings her arms from her sides, up and out in a sweep, often aiming to knock off the turban of the man nearest to her! The *pumelo* dance is executed by men only. In this the *pumelo* tied to the man's waist, hangs down behind like a tail, another end dangling in front. The movement of the dance keeps the two ends swinging round in circles.

Among the Mikirs there is a little dancing at the harvest time, but otherwise there is little music and dancing, except at funerals. The funeral dance is with shields. The young men and the boys join in this, the girls clutching the coats of the boys, and the boys clutching them round their belts. The women wear black scarves and petticoats with red stripes.

The Manipuri dances are colourful, and known all over the country. They are of four kinds—the *ras*, *maribok jagoi*, *khubetsaisakpa* and *sanjoiba*. The first three are done by girls, and the *sanjoiba* by boys. The dances and costumes are very ornate and picturesque.



## Laws & Customs

### (A) TRIBAL ORGANISATION

Even though the village remains the unit amongst the Naga tribes, the real unit is the clan. Often there is grave disagreement and feuds among the clans, and this mutual suspicion and jealousy is a weakening influence. A clan consists of a number of families, of which each has a head. The head of the family has to perform the religious duties and carry out the worship of the deity. As soon as the sons are married they set up a separate house, while the daughters on marriage go into another clan. Among the Tangkhuls, when a son is married, the parents have to relinquish quite a big proportion of their properties to him, and also vacate a part of the house.

The clan is strictly exogamous, and there is a common ancestor. In certain clans, however, inter-marriage is prohibited. A Naga village may have as many as two to ten clans. Each village has a well defined territory, often marked off with stone boundaries, and village rights to fisheries and so forth. Apart from being a distinct political and economic unit, the village is also a well knit religious community. Amongst certain Naga tribes there are separate houses for bachelors, access to which is denied to women. In these community houses of the Kabuis and Maram Nagas, even married men come to sleep. In some clans it was considered a gesture of public spiritedness to donate such houses for community living. The women, too, in some of the Naga clans, lived separately, and officials called Ningon-lakpas were deputed to supervise such places. It would appear that the efforts in such clans were directed towards segregation of men and women. In fact the difference between the sexes was the basis of much of the division of labour.

Each village had at least one officer, known as *khullakpa*, and sometimes two, the additional one being given the title of *huplakpa*. In a few villages e.g. those of the Kabui Nagas, another officer called *lumpoo* found place. The offices of all these were hereditary.

Prohibitions in food and in other matters often marked out Naga clans. A Maram man did not eat pork, and a Tangkhul would never keep or eat a goat.

Another factor distinguishing groups of villages of the Naga tribes was specialisation of work. For example the cloth weaving industry was confined to a set of six Tangkhul villages viz, Ukrul, Naimu, Sandang, Toinem and Phadang. These clans prohibit marriage of their girls outside their tribe in order to keep the valuable knowledge of weaving to themselves.

Though there is a semblance of strong tribal organisation among the Nagas, often the idea of tribal solidarity does not make any impress on them. A Kabui, for example, owes no duty to his tribe, nor does he enjoy any privileges therein. He does not acknowledge the suzerainty of any tribal head in regular or secular matters. In fact his worst enemies and opponents are often amongst those of his own tribe.

The Khasi tribes are neither strictly exogamous nor strictly endogamous, but they are more inclined to endogamy than the other way about. For example, Syntengs and Khasis both generally marry within their own respective tribes, and a Khasi man would not marry a Bhoi, War, or Lynngam woman. Many of the clans trace their descent from women ancestors who are called *Ki lawbet-Tynrai*, meaning literally 'grandmothers of the root'.

Some of the clans bear the names of animals, e.g. the Shrieh or monkey clan, the Tham or crab clan, and so forth. The villages combine voluntarily to form a group of which the head is the Siem, or chief. The Siem's powers are not supreme, and his State is a sort of limited monarchy. He has to consult his durbar of ministers on all important matters. The durbar, over which the Siem presides, is an executive council with judicial powers also. The summons it issues are not on paper

but in the form of a knotted string or cane, in which the more the number of the knots the greater the urgency of the summons ! The Siem has a deputy-governor called the Lyngskor, under whom there are village headmen known as Sirdars for collecting money which is a sort of subscription (called *pynsuk* = gratification), settling cases, and collecting labour. The Siem's income is derived from the *pynsuk*, and also from toll (*khrong*) from those who come to sell their goods in his territory. The judicial fines are divided between the chief and the members of the durbar. The Siem is appointed from the family of this name, which is spread over fifteen Khasi states. He is the religious as well as the secular head, and in the old days used to march at the head of the army in war. There is a customary line of succession which is followed. This system, however, was the old one and gradually yielded to a council elected by popular election, all adult males voting.

The Garo tribes have two distinct division—those who inhabit the Garo Hills and those who live in the plains. Of the former there are twelve main tribes, and of the latter about six. There is a legend about the way in which these divisions came into existence. It is said that when the Garos came to the hills a line of very powerful rulers arose, who imposed slavery on their people. Certain tasks were assigned to them which distinguished one class of Garos from another, and ultimately led to the divisions between them. For example, the Abengs were told to pick cotton, the Garo to carve out pig-troughs, the Kochus to prepare dried fish and the Chiksaks to collect edible bamboo shoots.

Apart from these divisions which are purely geographical, the Garos are divided into three exogamous septs or clans (called *katchis*)—the Momins, Maraka and Sangma. Yet another sub-division is known as the *machong*. This was originally a family, but later came to mean 'motherland', implying that all the members are descended from a common ancestress or mother. There are some interesting stories current about the origin of the *machongs*. The Ransangs belonging to the Marak clan have the bear as their totem. It is said that one

day a bear took some dainty things to eat, and leaving the forest, went into the village. There he met two women of the Momin and Sengma clan who asked him the price of his wares. The bear told them that he did not want silver or gold for his goods but a wife. The two women refused to marry him to pay the price, and went their way. Then he met a girl of the Marak clan who consented to buy his goods at the price named, and married him. When her family came to know of this unnatural union, they were filled with rage, and killed the bear. But none the less the woman gave birth to a child and the Rangsens who were his descendants, began to call themselves 'children of the bear'.

One of the tribes of the Momin clan have a dove as totem. The origin of this goes back to a folk tale according to which a little girl was shut up naked in a shed because she had been up to some mischief. Filled with shame at her nakedness, the girl asked some children playing nearby, for some feathers, fire and wax. She heated the wax, and with its help, stuck the feathers all over her body, and turned into a dove. The girl became the founder of the tribe.

The Drogres of the Marak clan have as their totem the hen. It is said that their ancestress had a wonderful ornament which could cluck like a hen and make a sound resembling 'drok! drok! drok'. So her descendants became known as Drogres.

The Koknal tribes of the Sangma clan had as their ancestress a fabulously rich woman who would always have herself carried in a basket, called *kok* in Garo language. Hence her descendants came to be known as Koknals.

The Mikirs are divided into three classes—the Chintongs, the Ronhang and the Amri. It is said that when the Mikirs migrated eastward, the slothful Amri were the last to arrive, and so they are not honoured at the general festivals, and when rice beer is distributed they do not get a share.

All these classes have exogamous groups in them called *kurs*, and these inter-marry. They can't marry within the *sema*

*kur*. There are also gradings between them in regard to rank and dignity, but they do not mind eating together and having social contact. The children take the *kur* of their father, and cannot marry within it. They may, however, marry their first cousins on their mother's side. The Mikir women have the prefix *ka* to their names, a usage they have borrowed from the Khasis. Similar prefixes to the names of men denote some special meaning e.g. *bi*=a goat, *long*=a stone, and *bura*=an old man.

The tribal organisation of the Kacharis is on totemistic basis though with very few exceptions, this concept is no longer given any significance. In the old days the sub-divisions were endogamous, but as time passed restrictions on inter-marriage were withdrawn. Some of these totemistic clans are as follows.

The Swarg-aroi (heaven folk) were considered to be of the highest class. Its member took part in religious ceremonies and lived on the offerings of worshippers. The Basumati-aroi (earth folk) enjoyed the privilege of burying their dead without purchasing land for making the grave. The Mosa-aroi (tiger folk) claimed kindred with the tiger, and whenever a tiger died nearby they went into mourning. The Gandret-aroi (leech folk) hold the leech in high regard, and refrain from killing it, except in certain purificatory ceremonies following death, in which they chew a leech along with vegetables. Similarly the Narze-aroi (jute folk) honour the jute plant, and on the occasion of certain religious ceremonies they must chew it. There are other such sects also, like the begging folk, the bamboo vessel folk, the areca folk, and so forth. Of these, as already mentioned, the totemic significance is lost. But in the case of the tiger folk it persists, and in case a tiger dies, they promptly go into mourning, which although brief (lasting not more than twenty-four hours), is undertaken with utmost seriousness. No solid food is taken, and at the end of the mourning period the women plaster the walls of the house with freshly prepared cow-dung, and all earthenware vessels except those still unused, are broken and thrown away. This latter custom naturally involves considerable monetary loss.

The Meitheis are divided into seven clans (*Saleis*)—Ningthaja, Kumul, Luang, Angom, Moirang, Khabananba and Chenglei. Each of the clans consists of sub-groups called *yumnaks*. The number of these varies from a hundred and fifteen to only seventeen in some places. Division into clans on the basis of occupation is also prevalent among the Meitheis. The Lois are divided into such clans. Thus the Lois of the salt-making trade will not give their girls to those who carry on the silk industry. Nor would a clan engaged in silk industry give his girl into a family of the salt-making clan. The object is to keep the trade within the clan.

## (B) MARRIAGE DIVORCE & ADULTERY

### Marriage :

The marriage customs of the Nagas are simple, but with interesting ceremonies. The bachelors, as we have seen, live in the Moorung—the bachelor's quarters. When one of them is minded to marry, he selects one of the girls living in the female quarters, usually a near cousin. He is allowed to visit the girl, and uses a peculiar method to get her consent. While smoking, he puts down his pipe as if by accident, and if the girl picks it up and starts smoking it, her agreement is signified. The youth informs his parents and they send ornaments for the girl which she wears, and liquor and betels for her parents. The boy's father sends cows, buffaloes, rice and liquor to the girl's house, and there is a grand feast. The youth then goes to the girl, accompanied by an old priestess carrying a basket of ginger, and says to his future wife 'I will neither desert you nor take another wife. Pray eat this ginger. From now on we are husband and wife'. The woman accompanying the youth then chews a piece of the ginger, and the girl does the same, and says 'I am your wife, you are my husband. I will obey you and not take another husband, for we are now husband and wife; in token of which I eat this ginger'. Thus the ceremony concludes, and the girl goes to her husband's home, where husband soon joins her, after quitting the Moorung. Some Nagas live separately immediately after marriage, while others set up a house with the birth of the first child.

Marriage is generally with near relations. An issueless widow must marry her dead husband's brother, and has to live with him even if he is a mere boy. He, too, cannot marry any woman other than her. But if the widow has children, she can't remarry. The Naga man is monogamous, and generally he can marry again only on the death of his wife.

Some Nagas, as for example the Angamis, have two forms of marriage—the one the ceremonial kind, and the other without any ceremony. In the informal marriage the man just takes the girl to his house, and usually this is a love marriage, not an arranged one. In the ceremonial marriage the man takes the help of an old woman who acts as the go-between and settles the simple dowry which consists normally of just a spear, two pigs and sixteen fowls. The auspicious date for settlement of the price is fixed by means of omens. A fowl is strangled, and if its right leg crosses over the left when it dies, it is considered a good omen. Both the couple note their dreams. If they dream of weeping, excreta, or the sex act, it is considered bad. Other dreams are a good sign. This is followed by much ceremonial feasting, both at the bride's and the bridegroom's place. The marriage is not consummated after these ceremonies, but later, sometimes after several months.

The marriage rites of the Angami Nagas of the Eastern country have slight variations. The dream omens are still there, but dreams of pigs and of corpses are considered bad, while those of a tiger, water, grain, and so forth, are good. After the preliminary feasting a young girl of the husband's clan sleeps in the night with the bride. The bridegroom goes away to his bachelor's quarters. But at midnight he returns to his house, and calling the girl companion who is sleeping with the bride, he conducts her to her own house. Then he comes back and knocks at his door and makes a noise to indicate his presence. All the occupants of the house, including parents, thereupon leave the house, and when the bride is thus left alone, the bridegroom enters and consummates the marriage. Next morning the bride and bridegroom bathe at separate

springs. After two or three days the bride makes the fireplace with stones given to her by her husband, and the two begin to live together. A widow can marry her husband's younger brother, though there is no compulsion, but she cannot marry the elder brother.

The Khasis have unusual marriage customs. Instead of bringing his bride home the husband himself goes to live in his mother-in-law's house. After the birth of one or two children, however, the couple may move to the house chosen by them and pooling their earnings set up home. In some tribes, particularly the Syntengs and the Maoshai, the case is somewhat different, and the husband does not live permanently in his wife's house but visits in only after dark. The Khasis are monogamists, though among the Ware men keep wives other than the legally married one. Marriage within the clan is strictly prohibited. A Khasi cannot also marry the daughter of his father's brother or that of his father's paternal uncle. He can, however, marry the daughter of his mother's brother, provided the brother is dead. He can also marry his dead wife's sister after a year of his wife's death on payment of a certain amount of money to the wife's clan. A widow keeps her husband's bones after his death and cannot marry till she has them. If she marries while she has the bones, she is looked down upon.

There are three kinds of ceremonies attending marriage—*Pynharsynjat*, *lamdoh* and *ladih-kiad*. Of these the first two are considered most respectable, and the last one, which requires considerably less expenditure, is resorted to by the poorer classes.

Having chosen his girl, the young man tells his parent about it. They ascertain regarding the suitability of the bride, and send a messenger to arrange matters with the bride's parents. A date is fixed for final settlement of the marriage if the bride's parents are agreeable, and the omens ascertained by breaking eggs and examining the entrails of fowls. If the omens are favourable, a date for the marriage is fixed. The bridegroom



in a procession to the bride's house and the bride and groom exchange bags of betel-nuts and silver or gold rings. The go-betweens (*kstangs*) of the two sides recite the sacred mantras. They then give gourds of fermented liquor to the priest, who mixes them solemnly, and placing three dried fish on the floor of the house, chants a prayer to the gods as follows : 'O god from above, O god from below, O god who is man's creator, you have ordained this marriage, and today the rings have been exchanged. You will know and hear in heaven that these two have been married today. Bless them and give them prosperity, show them the rightful path, so that they may be able to get home, food, and wealth'. The priest then pours the liquor on the ground. There follows an invocation to the relations and ancestors; a sacrifice of a pig or a fowl is made, and the fishes are tied to the ridgepole of the house amid merry-making. Two or three days after, the husband and wife come together.

The other ceremonies—the *lamdoh* and *ladih-kiad*—are simpler, and rings are not exchanged. Among the Lynngams similar ceremonies are held, the killing of fowls, sacrifice of pigs, and libation of liquor, being essential features.

Among the Garos there was, in the beginning intermarriage in the clans, that is to say one could not marry within his own clan. Marriages within the same clan were frowned upon. But with the advent of time this custom underwent a change, and people married not only within the clan but also within the same family.

The proposal generally comes from the girl, not from the man. The girl takes the assistance of her father, uncle, or brother to advance her proposal. Among the Abengs and the Matabengs the man at first refuses to marry the girl and runs and hides himself. When friends seek him and bring him out, he pretends to be very unwilling, and again escapes. But if he does this thrice, it means he does not wish to marry the girl. The girl then lives for a month or so before the wedding in the house of the bridegroom's parents (the youth being away in the bachelor's house); and gets acquainted with the family.

Among another clan, the Machis, the custom is to send a dish of rice to the chosen man, who is lodged in the bachelor's house, through a female relation of his. The girl follows behind, but remains in hiding. If the man eats of the rice, the girl takes it as assent, and comes out of her hiding place. If he refuses to eat, the girl tries again, this time by going late at night and lying down quietly by the boy's side. The boy makes no advances, but conveys his decision, and if it is a 'yes', the girl takes it as okay and the two become husband and wife without any more ceremony.

A custom which existed in ancient days among the Atongs, but which was later given up, was that on the occasion of an important festival the young girls and men slept together after the feasting was over. It was not obligatory for them to marry, except for those who became mothers. But the custom soon became extinct.

The marriage ceremony of the Garos has little religious significance. There is the usual feasting and merry-making on the occasion. But they are very particular about omens before agreeing to a marriage contract. Some of these omens are :

1. The priest takes two fowls, a cock, and a hen, holding them so that their heads are close together, and hits them with a heavy stick. When he drops them they writhe about for some time, and if they die with their beaks pointing towards one another, it is supposed to be a good omen; if the beaks are away from each other it is considered unlucky.

2. The priest takes a hen, and holding it with its legs, strikes the woman with it on her back. Then he does the same with the man, but using this time a cock. Thereafter he pulls off the heads of both the birds and throws them on the ground. If the beak of the cock points towards the woman and that of the hen towards the man, it is a good omen.

3. A bird's stomach is cut open and the large intestines pulled out. If they hang together the omen is good, but if

they are apart it means desertion or death. If the intestines contain digested food the couple will be rich, but if the intestines are empty they will be poor.

4. This ceremony is to gauge the success of the future son-in-law. A goat or a bull is killed and the gall-bladder washed and inspected. If it is full of liquid, it is believed the young man will have wealth and prosperity.

The Garos are polygamous, but usually the limit is three wives. A Garo man may marry two sisters, but in such case the elder one before the younger one. A second wife is taken after obtaining the permission of the first.

No money is paid as marriage price. Occasionally a lad of a wealthy family may receive a sword, shield and spear, or a cow or a bull.

Among the Mikirs the age of marriage is generally nineteen for the man and fifteen for the girl. There are no child marriages. When a lad takes a liking to a girl he sends his parents to her father's house to get his agreement. If this is forthcoming, the boy's father leaves an engagement ring or a bracelet for the girl, and to strengthen the matter the further, a gourd of beer. If subsequently she does not marry young man, the ring or bracelet has to be returned. If the gourd of beer is accepted, a fine is to be paid to the village council in addition. After some time the date of marriage is finalised. The bridegroom's party entertain the village folk with drink, and when the marriage party goes to the bride's house a gourd of beer is given to each village on the way. When the party reach the bride's house the bride's father is presented with a gourd of beer and a bottle of liquor. There is a brief customary dialogue between the fathers of the bride and the bridegroom thus :

Bride's father : Why have you come with these offerings ?

Bridegroom's father : Your sister (meaning his wife) is getting too old for work, so we have brought our son to wed your daughter,

Bride's father : My daughter is not worthy enough; she has no skill in weaving and other household work.

Bridegroom's father : Don't worry, we'll teach her all that.

Thereafter the bride's mother inquires of her daughter if the boy is acceptable to her. Sometimes the process takes up almost the entire night, and should this be case, the old men on either side sing in a chorus 'We cannot send our daughter to your house !' and 'We cannot give you our boy !' If the consent is obtained, the beer and liquor are accepted, and the bride makes the bed for her future husband. If the lad is of a shy nature, he does not go to sleep in it but sends one of his garments instead !

After that either the girl goes to her husband's place the next day, or alternately the lad stays in his father-in-law's house and works there.

Originally the Kachari tribes were endogamous, but later on such restrictions were removed. Monogamy is the rule, and polyandry strictly prohibited.

In a few cases there is marriage by capture, but this generally occurs where there has been an affair between the boy and the girl. Although this practice meets with censure, the couple are allowed to remain together on payment of a fine from the young man. Usually the practice is for the parents of the lad, accompanied by elders of the family, to go to the bride's place with presents of rice, liquor and betel-nuts, and ask for the hand of the girl for their son. The dowry, which is small, is paid by the bridegroom's family to the parents of the bride. The marriage never takes place before the girl attains puberty.

If the bridegroom is not able to rig up the stipulated bride money, in lieu thereof he takes up service in the house of the bride's parents for a fixed period, at the end of which he and the girl are free to go wherever they like. In some cases the bridegroom severs all relationship with his own family when he starts serving at his father-in-law's house.

The marriage party which goes to the house of the bride does not have the bridegroom with it. They take with them pigs, rice liquor and betels, and food for men who they fear may stop them on the way. A peculiar custom is that when the party reach the bride's house they are sprinkled with water mixed with the juice of the *kachu* plant which is an irritant, and can even cause blisters ! The bridegroom's party has to quietly submit to this treatment. There follows much feasting. The elders sit in front, and the younger people behind. The bride serves them herself with rice and curry, after which the couple kneel in the midst of the assembled company to get their blessings. One of the village elders instructs the bride and the groom in the duties of married life. The whole day is spent in feasting and merry-making, and in the evening the bride leaves for her new home. A strange custom is that while on the journey if any river, embankment or such obstacle has to be crossed, the bride must be presented at each spot of this nature with nine areca nuts and nine betel leaves. When the bride enters the house all those who bring her in, get a jar of molasses and a flask of liquor. The entire expenditure is borne by the family of the bridegroom.

The Meitheis marry outside their clan, but generally keep within the tribe. They are polygamous. Marriage by one man with two sisters is allowed, provided the elder one is taken as wife before the younger. Marriage of a low caste man with a high caste woman is not prohibited, and in such a case the low caste man is admitted into the high caste tribe. A man could not marry a woman of the clan from which his mother came. A widow could marry, but not with her dead husband's brothers.

The ceremony, apart from the feasting, is held at the bride's house. A *kirtan* is organised, the bride sitting in it in front of the bridegroom. Mantras are recited and the ancestry of the couple announced. The bride walks seven times round the bridegroom, casting flowers on him. The couple are then garlanded, and being seated side by side, their garments are knotted together. The *kirtan* is again started, and the assembled

people prostrate themselves before the couple. The husband and wife then sit on the same mat and offer each other betels and sweetmeats. Offerings of betels are made to them by those present, and then the bride goes to her husband's home.

Amongst the Santhals marriage within the same *gotra*, of which there are twelve, is prohibited. There are many kinds of marriage customs, of which the following are the prominent ones.

The marriage proposal is talked over first between the parents of the boy and the girl. Thereafter the girl along with her companions, goes to see the bridegroom. If she likes him, the parents settle the marriage. In the ceremony flower garlands are exchanged between the bride and the bridegroom. The bridegroom puts vermilion on the bride's forehead. The elders give the couple advice about marriage. The bridegroom's party give some cash, and the bride's brother gets a calf.

In a main festival, an eligible young man puts a little vermilion on any girl he likes. If the girl, too, likes him, she agrees, and then the wedding is performed. But should she show her dislike, the youngman has to pay a fine in cash and two pigs have to be given by him. He does not, of course, get his girl.

In yet another kind of marriage, the affair is simplicity itself. The boy and the girl just start living together without performing any ceremony at all.

### Divorce

Divorce is not difficult to obtain amongst the Nagas, and is for general reasons like infidelity on the part of the woman, incompatible temperament, failure to bear children, and so forth. If the woman is divorced because of infidelity all her clothes and ornaments are taken by the husband's family, and the expenses of a second marriage by the husband are recovered from her family. But in other cases the wife receives one third of the grain. If the woman leaves her husband for no fault of his, but just because he is not to her liking, she has to pay the money spent in the marriage ceremony.

Divorce amongst the Khasis is common, and for reasons similar to those among the Nagas, such as barrenness, incompatibility, adultery, and so forth. It must be with the consent of both parties, but among the Wars it can be on the desire of either one of them.

When a Khasi couple mutually agree to divorce, there is a brief and simple symbolic ceremony which is performed in the open air, and in the presence of the relations on each side. The couple seeking divorce bring five *cowries* each. The wife gives her five to the husband, who places them with his own, and then returns all of them to her. The wife then hands the husband all the ten *cowries* and he throws them on the ground. The ceremony concluded, a crier goes round the village proclaiming that the divorce has been effected. The divorced woman can marry whomsoever she wishes, and the man any woman, but not within the family of the husband or the wife. If a husband or a wife is absent without any communication for more than ten years, a divorce ceremony is performed by their relations.

Among the Syntengs and some other tribes, divorce can take place even without the consent being mutual, and the party who wishes it has to pay a kind of compensation.

The Garos permit divorce in case of disagreement between the couple, when both agree to separate, when either party is guilty of adultery, or when the husband refuses to work and thus support his family.

The village elders inquire into the matter, and if they are satisfied, a little ceremony takes place before the assembled village folk. The couple take dust in their hands and swear by Mother Earth not to have anything to do with each other. The priest takes a sword, a chopper, or a spear, provided by the man, and striking a tree with it calls on it to be a witness as the 'earth's son'. The implement is kept by the priest for his labours.

Compensation is in the form of a brass gong, or a piece of

black cloth, or a small sum of money. But the practice changed with the times, and more and more couples seeking divorce, began to go to law courts and claim heavy compensation.

Divorce is rare among the Mikirs. Generally it is allowed if there is no issue, or if the girl goes to her mother's place and refuses to live with the husband. The husband then presents a gourd of beer to the girl's parents and claims her freedom. Both he and the girl can in these circumstances, contract another marriage.

Among the Kacharis divorce can be had by mutual consent. The couple appear before the village elders and state their case. They tear a betel leaf into two to signify that they can never again unite. If the village elders feel there is sufficient justification for the divorce, the injured husband can recover the marriage expenses. If however they feel there is no justification, the husband has to pay a certain fine to the village assembly. The divorcee is at liberty to live with another husband.

If a Meithei man divorces his wife without cause, she gets all his property except for a drinking vessel, and a cloth for his loins. They may separate by mutual consent, and a wife may, on her own volition, divorce her husband if she gives him the price of a slave.

Divorce is allowed among the Santhals on payment of a small fine to the woman by the man who wishes to divorce her. A similar fine is payable by a man who wishes to marry a divorced woman.

### **Adultery**

Pre-marital relations are rare among the Nagas, and there is complete freedom of choice in selecting a mate, subject to clan customs. Chastity differs from tribe to tribe, but most of the Naga girls are chaste, and are watched carefully to prevent them entering into illicit amours.

Adultery is frowned upon, and a Naga wife is rarely false to her husband. Though freedom is allowed to maidens and



youths, once marriage takes place, any breach of the marriage vow gets strong punishment. The Cachar Nagas either put the adulteress to death or turn her out of the village. Among the Angamis there is the severest punishment for it. If a man's wife is seduced, the husband kills the seducer at the first opportunity. The man who commits adultery has his head severed, or he is tied with cords to a tree and crucified. His limbs may be severed in a conspicuous place, or alternately his hands and feet being secured, he is just put into a basket and rolled down from the top of a hill he is dead. Among the Kaupuis, however, the punishment is not so severe. The woman escapes without punishment, and if the adulterer is killed in revenge by the husband, the wife returns to her father's house.

Adultery is uncommon amongst the Khasis. The punishment for it used to be a very heavy fine plus a pig, or in lieu of it imprisonment for life. Later on the quantum was reduced. A husband catching his wife making love to another man could kill both of them without facing a charge of murder, but he had to deposit a certain sum of money a pig in the Siem's durbar if he killed the erring persons.

The moral standards of the Garos are high, and there are practically no prostitutes amongst them. Adultery, however, is common. The penalty in the old times for the first offence, was to tear off the lobes of the woman and to reduce her clothes to rags, so that her neighbours would scorn her, and if she repeated the offence, to put her death. The man was sold into slavery, or killed.

The Mikir girls preserve their chastity before marriage, and rarely have pre-marital sex. But if a young man seduces a girl, they are obliged to marry. There is no punishment for this. Years ago both boys and girls lived together in the bachelor's dormitories, and also worked together in the field. There would be illegitimate births then, but this is no longer so.

After marriage cases of adultery are exceedingly few. If one does occur, the matter is brought to the village assembly who impose a fine. The guilty man and woman are tried publicly,

exposed to the jeers of the neighbours, until the man pays the fine, which is distributed to the elders of the assembly. The husband takes back his wife, but may refuse to do so if she is barren. There is no capital punishment for adultery.

The moral standard of the Kacharis is very high, and cases of adultery are few. The unmarried girls are chaste, but when it is suspected that one of them has gone astray a kind of lie test is given to them. All the girls of the family gather round the sacred *sifu* tree in the courtyard. Some uncooked rice is buried in the ground, and allowed to remain overnight. Next morning it is taken out and a little given to each girl to chew. The offender is not able to chew the grains of rice because due to fear, the saliva does not come to the mouth. She is then made to disclose the name of her lover, and the latter is compelled to marry the girl, particularly if she is pregnant. In case she is not pregnant, and her parents do not consider the seducer fit enough to marry their daughter, the matter is referred to the village assembly who impose a fine on the guilty man.

### (C) LAWS, DISPUTES & PROPERTY

#### Land Laws :

Land is owned by different people in the Naga tribes, but it cannot go out of the clan. If an owner tries to dispose of his land to a person who is not of the clan of the village, he is severely censured. The villages are demarcated by boundary stones and the villagers have complete rights of hunting and fishing within their villages, and in addition the rights of making terraces for cultivation. There are also many regulations in respect of water distribution in terraced land, varying from village to village, in order to ensure equitable distribution of water. The highest fields get the water first, it is then passed on to the lower ones. Each owner is obliged to have a retaining wall, generally of piled stone, and to keep it in a good state of repair.

Among certain migratory tribes like the Kukis, Mikirs and Rengmas of the plains, there is no private right to land because there is plenty for everyone. These tribes are not hard pressed

for land. Their villages are small and compact, and there is extensive uncut jungle.

Among the Angamis, Lhotas and Aos, the individual property rights are well defined, and rules of inheritance, partition and so forth, are determined strictly by customary law. The Angamis buy and sell land, while other tribes let it out in patches enough to support a household.

In several Angami villages a certain amount of jum land is set apart for thatching grass or for preserving cane for villages. The land can also be cultivated by mutual consent, though of ten powerful man may grab some land in this reserved area.

Among the Khasis there is a different land tenure in the two main divisions, namely the Jaintia Hills and the main Khasi Hills. In the Khasi Hills there are two divisions of land—public and private. Of the public land, one kind is the Siem's Crown land meant for the support of the Siem family. This land cannot be alienated. Then there is land for supporting the priests of the State. Some of this land is used for growing paddy the proceeds of which go to this purpose, and part of the land is reserved for carrying on worship. The third variety of public land is the one meant for supplying firewood, thatching grass, and so forth. This land can also be cultivated by the village folk, but it is not transferable. The fourth variety is land comprising the sacred groves of oak or rhododendron trees, generally near the summit of the hills. The wood of the trees in these groves can be used only for cremation. Apart from this, felling of trees is an offence.

The private land is either owned by the clan as a whole, or by individuals. All the members of the clan are entitled to share in the produce, and no land belonging to the clan can be alienated without the consensus of the clan.

Private land is acquired as inheritance, or by purchase. According to the Khasi law of entail, property descends from the mother to the youngest daughter. The ancestral landed property is thus always owned by women, and the male

members only cultivate the fields. The produce is taken to the mother's house, and it is she who divides it between the members of the family.

In the Jaintia Hills the division of landed property was somewhat different. There was the *hali* or irrigated paddy land, of which there were fair divisions, viz, the land of Raja of Jaintiapur (government property), land given free to officers who carried out the administration, land set aside for purposes of worship, not assessed to land revenue, and lastly private lands held by occupants transferred by mortgage, sale, or otherwise; such land not being assessed to land revenue.

Then there are the high lands which are privately held like *hali* private land, and unclaimed land or waste land belonging to the government.

There are also some tracts in the War country which are *seng* land, a *seng* being a collection of families sprung from a common ancestor or ancestress. These lands mainly belong to clans said to be descended from three men.

In the Lyingam country the crop is taken by the person who cultivates the land, though the land belongs to the family. Outsiders are admitted as cultivators, but they have to pay a small sum of money to each person in the village in whose circle they cultivate.

The land of the Garos is subject to the laws of inheritance. The real owner is the wife of the headman of each village, and the land can be sold only with her permission. There is no bar to anyone cultivating as much land as he requires for his needs within the village boundary. Strangers who come from outside can also cultivate, but after giving a small present or quit rent to the headman, either as lump sum payment or annually. The annual rent is levied generally on all outside clans who wish to take a share in cultivation, lest they set up a claim. This quit rent may also be paid in kind, in the form of the paddy, fowls, liquor and the like.

Certain acts, which seem petty, are greatly resented by the

Garos. If a stranger should buy a big drum in the village or wear elbow rings, which is only the headman's privilege, or offer sacrifice at the *asong*, which is a large stone outside the village at which customarily the people carry out sacrifices, the Garos will not like it.

Among the Mikirs, the sons inherit and in the absence of sons, the brothers. The wife and daughter do not come in the line of inheritance. If there are no sons living, however, the widow can retain the property by marrying into her husband's tribal division, but she keeps her personal property and ornaments. Often the eldest son gets somewhat more than the others in case of a family division.

Villages do not have fixed boundaries and in fact change their locations according to availability of cultivated land. Land is not charged for, only there is a house tax to be paid. The cultivable area is settled amongst the house-holders by the village council. The head of each household chooses his land, and disputes in this regard are referred to the village council, who either make a compromise or if they are unable to do so, the households who are dissatisfied move to another place. The territorial divisions are the *mauzas* each of which has a *mauzadar* as head.

The mode of inheritance of the Kacharis is not very crystallised, but when the head of the household dies, the eldest son customarily takes charge of the property and supports his widowed mother and other family members. Ultimately, however, the family breaks up and the property is partitioned between the sons, who get equal shares, except for the eldest son who gets a half share in addition. The daughters, particularly if married, have no claim. When a man dies without sons, the property goes to the eldest surviving brother, who makes necessary provision for the deceased's widow and daughters.

Among the Meitheis, all the land belongs to the Raja who superintends it through an official called Phoonam Salcomba. It is his duty to receive rent for the land and do everything

connected with it in the interest of the Raja. The land is divided into village land which is looked after by the headman who supervises the cultivation and realises the tax. The headman is merely the agent of the Raja and has no interest in the land. Some grants of land are made to officials and to those whom the Raja wishes to favour either for a specific time or for their life-time only. The usual rent for the land is paid by them.

Besides this each individual who is obliged to labour for the State gets as payment of his labour one *purree* (about three acres) of land on payment of the regular rent. Rent in kind is also paid in the form of grain, ranging from two to thirteen baskets for each *purree* of land. The Raja is the absolute proprietor of the land and he can dispose of it as he wills. A salutary provision is that everyone has to cultivate some land and pay rent for it. Thus no land is left uncultivated.

The unit of the Santhal community is the village. The headman called Manjhi, collects rents and does the other work of administration. The headman has two assistants one known as Paramanik and the other Jogmanjhi. In case of the headman dies without leaving any sons or brothers, the Paramanik gets his office. The headman is given a peon or orderly (called the Goddet) who carries out the function of calling the village folk, collecting fowls for sacrifices and so forth. If the Paramanik becomes Majhi, the orderly in turn gets a rise to the position of a Paramanik. Sometimes the orderly is so powerful that he displaces even the headman. There is also an officer called Parganait in charge of a group of villages who is assisted by another official called the Dish-manjhi, and messengers known as Chakladars. All these positions are by custom hereditary.

In each group of villages there are two councils—the upper and the lower. The former is the Panchayat which is presided over by the Parganait and decides the more important matters. The other council is the Kulidrup which is presided over by headman, and this decides matters of a less important nature,

**(B) PROPERTY**

It is a rule among the Nagas that property cannot be allowed to be inherited by one outside the clan except occasionally to the daughters and children. Any verbal wishes of the bequeather regarding the disposal of his property are given effect to. Ordinarily the next male heirs inherit subject to one third to be retained by the widow. Only males can inherit, and the property is shared equally between sons and first cousins. Usually a man divides the property during his life time. When the sons marry each receives his share, and in case of death, the youngest son gets all the property, though this rule has various modifications from one tribe to another according to verbal directions. The property of a son who dies without a male heir goes to the father if he is alive and after the death of the father to the youngest son, who may share it with his brothers or keep it all himself, as he desires. If the youngest son dies, the property is shared by all the other brothers. In case there are no male heirs in the first line of descent, second cousin and so forth inherit. If there are no relatives living, the kindred inherit and failing them, the clan. Among the Memi, if there are no sons to inherit, the daughter inherits. But the general rule is that no land can be permanently inherited by a woman. However a man can leave some land to his daughter for her lifetime. After her death, it reverts to the male heirs. A woman's own property however, goes to her children and if there are no children to her father's heirs.

Among the Nagas of Manipur the village office of *Khullakpa* (meaning 'leader of the village') is the most important due to the special privileges attached to it. A peculiar custom existing among the Nagas of this area is that a number of articles which are believed to be of use to a dead man are put in his grave. Thus there is considerable diminution in the property left behind for the heirs. When the eldest son of the family marries, the parents leave the house, the son taking almost two-thirds of the property. The same process is repeated when the other son's marry. But if the parents are well to do they often provide a separate house for the married son. There

are variations in the procedure of inheritance from tribe to tribe. For example among the Tangkhuls, on the death of the father the eldest son gets a double share, and the others single ones. Among the Jessamis the youngest son gets the house and the most valuable part of the property and other sons get equal share. Among the Liyais the sons share the property equally and the girls get a share of the domestic goods. Generally women have little right in inheritance.

The Khasis do not have any separate law of property and the same principle as in land tenure, applies to other property as well. As regards inheritance they have a saying. From the woman, the clan, and descent is counted from the mother alone. Thus the woman's position is decidedly more prominent than that of the man, and of the woman, that of the youngest daughter. It is she who gets the biggest share of the family property. If the youngest daughter dies, she is succeeded by the next youngest daughter and so forth. If there are no daughters the inheritance goes to the sister's youngest daughter who is succeeded by *her* youngest daughter, and so forth. In the absence of sister's daughters the succession goes to the mother's sisters and then to female descendants. There are some variations among different tribes, but in most cases the succession is through women, and men seldom inherit except keeping their self-acquired property. In the War country however, both male and female children inherit ancestral and acquired property, except that the youngest daughter is given something more than others. Among the Mikirs Bhois the position is different, and males succeed to all property. The laws of inheritance among the Lyingams are the same as those for Khasis. The youngest daughter gets the largest share, the rest being divided between the other daughters, while the sons do not get anything.

Unlike most other tribes the system of adoption prevails among the Khasis. If there are no female members in the house, a girl from another family is adopted to carry out the religious rites and to inherit the family property, as otherwise, the family being extinct, the entire property would pass to the



Siem. The adopted girl becomes the head of the family known as *ka trai ting*. No religious ceremony is performed at the time of adoption among the Khasis, though the Syntengs do observe ceremony of a kind followed by a feast.

Among the Garos, too, inheritance is through the mother and restricted to the female line. Men do not inherit property. Only their self-acquired property is theirs. The daughter inherits, and after her, her daughter, and if there is no issue another woman of the clan appointed by some of the clan members inherits. Once in the motherhood, the property cannot get away from it. If a daughter dies issueless, her husband cannot inherit property. The husband may, however, marry again, and in that case the second wife would be able to inherit the property. Indirectly property is retained within the motherhood through the institution of the *nokram* who is a kind of representative of the man whose property is inherited. He is generally the son of the man's sister and he marries his uncle's daughter as well as his uncle's widow when his uncle dies. The *nokram* is the support of the family (*nok*=house; *krong*=post), for it is he who ensures in the long run that property does not pass out of the wife's *machong* (motherhood). Apart from this institution, there is no adoption among the Garos.

Among the Mikirs it is the sons who have preferential claim to property, and failing them, the brothers, and after the brothers the nearest agnate of the man's tribal division (*Kur*). If there are no sons or brothers, the widow may keep back the property by marrying into her husband's *Kur*. Her personal property and ornaments are, however, her's alone. Apart from this, the wife and daughters have no right to the property.

The Mikirs have more or less a joint family. The sons live together and support their mother if widowed. The property is divided between the sons at the will of the father, who can give whatever share he wishes to each of them. If there is no such previous division the eldest son, on the father's death,

gets slightly more than the others. There is no adoption among the Mikirs also.

There is occasional adoption among the Kacharis, and orphans are adopted usually by their close relatives, but sometimes by others as well. The adopted children are treated well and given the due consideration which a family member ought to receive. As regards inheritance of property, as we have seen, usually the eldest son gets it, and in case the property is partitioned in the father's life time, he gets a bigger share than the other sons.

Movable property passes on to the youngest son among the Meitheis, if the son has not separated. In case he has left his ancestral home the property is divided equally between all the sons. Often the will of the testator prevails and the property is given by him to one of the family members who is most in need of it.

### (C) DECISION OF DISPUTES

Before the establishment of regular courts disputes were settled among the Angami Nagas by a council of elders who would also consult the general public in the matter, and thus a fully democratic system of settlement existed. As regards matters connected with customs, the council of elders is the final authority. Great reliance is placed on oaths, for it is believed that anyone who took a false oath would surely come to grievous harm. Several forms of taking the oath exist. Sometimes a twig is held in the right hand while the man swears the oath, which signifies that if the oath is false he will dry up like the twig. Or the swearer may turn his cloth so as to expose the seams and undo his knotted hair. After swearing, the man says 'If I am speaking a lie, let me be ruined like burnt out fire or rotted twine.' In fact, if any disease strikes the individual, or if an epidemic overtakes the village, it is put down to the false oath taken. Other interesting methods of taking the oath may be mentioned. The two parties cut apart a dog, or a fowl, and hold a spear between the severed parts.

Or they pull apart a living fowl, one man holding the head and the other the body. Biting of a gun-barrel, spear-head or tiger's tooth, while taking the oath is another form of oath taking, or standing within a circle of rope or cane and saying that if the swearer breaks his word he will rot away like the cane. Other oaths are taken by certain articles like timber, or an axe, or by animals such ■ a cat, often by a derty.

There are two forms of ordeal used in clan disputes, one by water and the other related to a certain condition, viz. the next death in the clan. According to the former, the headmen of the two clans, successively hold their heads under water in some stream. The clan of the headman who can hold down his head longest is the victor.

- In case the wrongdoer refuses to take an oath he gets the punishment prescribed by the customary law. Violating a taboo is usually punished with a fine to be paid to the village, and if the violation is serious, by banishment for ■ fixed term. In case of rape, the rapist is given a thorough beating by the women of the victim's kindred and expelled from the village for three months. Apart from the ignominy which theft and murder entailed, there was specific punishment for these crimes. In case of theft seven times of the value of the property stolen was levied as punishment on the thief, and if he could not pay it, he was beaten by the kindred of the affected person. The punishment for murder differs according to the circumstances in which it was committed. If accidental or during the course of a fight the punishment is banishment from the village for seven years and confiscation of property. If the murder was by treachery or stealth and also premeditated, the period of banishment could be longer, sometimes extending to the whole generation.

Among the Khasis the process of deliberation and decision of disputes is more elaborate. The complaint is first conveyed to the Siem or chief and an attempt is made by the Siem and his head-man to effect a compromise between the parties. Failing this the durbar is summoned for deciding the issue. This durbar is not of that kind with which we are familiar,

but an assembly of all the grown up males of the village who are informed to come together by a crier who goes round the village, much like the *duggi* beaten in the villages of Northern India. After this proclamation is made, no one must leave the village, but present himself positively at the durbar. The proceedings at the durbar are opened by the headman, the Siem presiding. The durbar may go on for several days. Pleaders allowed, and witnesses are given the oath before testifying. The oath is by swearing on a pinch of salt placed on a sword, or a gourd full of liquor. The complainants and the defendants, too, pledge themselves by throwing down before the durbar a turban, or a bag of betels and lime. The Siem obtains the finding of the durbar and pronounces the sentence, which is usually a fine. The losing party is ordered to present a pig. Since there are very few jails, criminals are not sentenced to imprisonment but may be ordered to work as menial servants with the Siem.

The Khasis punished heinous crimes severely. Murder was punished by beating the accused to death with clubs, except in the killing of a robber or a human victim for sacrifice, in which case merely a fine of a small sum of money and a pig, was levied. Arson, adultery and rape on a married woman, were punished with life imprisonment. But if the victim of rape was not married a heavy fine and the usual pig were substituted. Thieves and robbers were placed in the stock. It was believed that a person guilty of incest (which meant sex with a woman of one's own clan) would, apart from being awarded the statutory punishment of exile and fine, be also punished by meeting his death accidentally or by being mauled by a tiger, struck by lightning, or dying in child-birth.

Although ordeals are now unknown, they existed among the Khasis in the early years of the century. In the water ordeal a spear was fixed in some deep pool. The disputants dived one by one to retrieve it, and the one who stayed longest in the water won. Or two pots were put in shallow water, one containing a piece of silver, the other a piece of gold. The person who brought out the gold was the winner. If both succeeded in bringing out the same metal, a compromise was

effected by dividing the property in dispute equally between the two.

Another ordeal is, as we have seen, by invoking the divine goddess through a gourd filled with liquor. A feathered arrow is also implanted in the liquor. Various invocations to the heavenly goddess are made. A Khasi greatly dreads being made to undergo this particular form of ordeal, for he is fully convinced that if he swears falsely by the gourd, he will die.

In days past the village councils of the Garos decided all disputes. Later this function was taken over by the *taskars* who were honorary magistrates combining in them police functions. When there was insufficient evidence before the village council, a kind of trial by ordeal was resorted to, which unlike that in other tribes, was a real ordeal ! One such ordeal was that of the hot iron-called *sil-soa*. In this a bit of metal was heated ceremonially by the priest, to whom a small amount was offered as fee. The priest laid some cotton and jack-fruit leaves on the outstretched palm of the person undergoing the ordeal, and placed the red-hot metal on it. The man closed his hand, and the metal was drawn through it. If the man was innocent it was believed the iron would not burn him. Another ordeal was by boiling water. In this an egg was placed in a pot full of water ■ boiling point. If the man could remove it without scalding his hand he was supposed to be guiltless. Another way was to tie a man to a tree and leave him all night in a forest. If he was devoured by a wild beast he was considered guilty, but if he survived, his innocence was proved. Later on, instead of a man, a bullock or fowl was tied to come to a conclusion.

A Garo takes the oath by biting on the tooth of a tiger, as though to say, 'May I be eaten up by a tiger if I am lying'. Another form of oath is similar to the one prevalent among the Nagas. The head of a fowl is cut off and the eye pierced by a sharp bamboo slip. The man taking the oath bites on the severed head and says, 'May my eyes be destroyed like this if I am lying.'

The Garos are very fond of bringing claims for compensation, which are even on flimsy grounds. Despite the large number of disputes among them, many end in compromise, which is effected by each taking hold of the other's wrist and declaring his satisfaction, followed by a drink from the same cup and chewing the *dika* grass.

Among the Mikirs, too, disputes are decided by the village council, of which all male householders are members. The village council is presided over by an elected head, and it is he who summons it whenever necessary.

All disputes are decided by the village council which has the power of levying fines. But the more serious matters are adjudicated by the great council which consists of the presidents of all the village councils concerned, and meets under the chairmanship of a *mauzadar* who is the senior most village council president. All wider questions involving groups of villages, like depredation by wild beasts, adultery, and so forth are decided by the great council.

The Chief court of the Meitheis was known as the Chirap, which had about twenty-five standing members, and other officers of the State, making a total of sixty to eighty. There was a separate court dealing with matters relating to women like divorce, marriage rights, disputed paternity, and so forth.

Complaints were presented to the courts accompanied by gifts in kind, which took the place of stamp and court fees. After decision of the case, too, gifts were made by both parties. Oaths were uncommon and where made, were by pouring water over a gun a spear and then drinking it, or taking a tiger's tooth between the lips. Ordeals were not commonly prevalent. However a case of the Raja or Chourjit which occurred in 1804 is recorded, which shows that they were not unknown in early times. The Raja was tried for conspiracy, and to prove his innocence he placed his hand on a blazing fire. Surprisingly he was unharmed and so acquitted of the charge.

Among the Santhals of Assam all petty disputes are decided by the Kulidrup or village council, which meets generally in front of the house of the headman. If, however, the matter is of a delicate nature involving morals or character, the council meets at a secluded place so as to prevent causing any embarrassment. Graver matters are decided by the panchayat, which is a more comprehensive body.

## Religion

The Nagas have some vague concept about a divine power whom they consider the Creator of the world and controller of events. They call Him the Divine Spirit. And so indefinite is the concept of the Nagas about such a Being that we have no pictures or images of Him. They have no established form of worship, and no temples or priests for service of God. They have also some faint idea of the immortality of the soul. The Angami Nagas believe that if they lead good and worthy lives, and abstain from eating flesh and such coarse diet, their souls will fly to the worlds above and become stars. Some even believe that after passing through seven stages of life they will eventually become transformed into bees. Others feel that there is nothing hereafter and that 'after death we are buried in the earth and our bodies rot there, and there is an end; who knows more?'\* But this is view of some only. That they have a definite concept of life in the future, can't be denied, because when one among them dies they bury certain of his things like the dead man's spear, clothes, and so forth, with him.

The tangkhuis and Mao Nagas believe that the world was once an expanse of water. The diety was imprisoned under it and made efforts to escape, which resulted in hills. Another belief is that the sky is the male principle and the earth the female principle, and an earthquake is caused by their embracing. Akin to the Hindu story of Rahu and Ketu, the Kabui have one to explain eclipses. A man called Neume had a dog. The children of the man became lepers. One day the leper children cut off the tail of a grass snake, but found that it had

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\* John Butler, Rough Notes on the Angami Nagas, J.A.S. 1875 Vol. XLIV No. 4.



healed again due to the miraculous property of the root of a tree in which the snake hid. The children too, were thus healed, and so they took off the bark of the tree and wrapped it in a cloth. One day they put it out to dry and the sun stole it. But the dog tracked him and ate him up. In the same way the moon is caught and eaten.

Though the Naga has a vague idea about an omnipotent God, he does believe that by prayers ceremonies and in-cantations he can escape some impending misfortune. Thus he believes in gods dwelling in every hill, valley and grove. Captain Butler records his experience as follows : 'I have known a Chief, on the occasion of the death of his favourite son from an attack of fever contracted whilst out shooting Gurai in the neighbourhood of his village, don his full war-costume, rush out to the spot, and there commence yelling out his war-cry, hurling defiance at the deity who he supposed had struck down his son, bidding him come out and show himself, impiously cursing him for his cowardice in not disclosing himself. Intense superstition is of course only the natural corollary to this kind of belief in a god in every hill and valley, a devil in every grove and stream'\*

Thus when an epidemic as that of small-pox comes to a village, the Nagas will plant spears in the ground outside the village so that the spirit of the spears can fight the spirit of the smallpox and defeat it ! In order to avoid the small pox 'spirit' they do not enter through the village gate when the epidemic strikes, but use some other pathway to have access to their homes. When a man is ill bamboo spikes are put over the door of the house along with crude bamboo masks cut out of a bark, with holes for eyes and mouth to prevent visitors from being infected. Wormwood leaves are considered useful in keeping away epidemics and are struck on the forehead when approaching a sick man. Women similarly protect their infants by carrying a sickle before them with wormwood tied to it. Disease can also be averted by offering gifts of cloth,

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\* The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century. Ed. by Verrier Elwin, Oxford, 1969.

chickens and eggs, to the spirit of disease. A number of spirits are revered by the Angamis. The Ukepenopfu is considered the creator of living beings, and Rutzeh the evil spirit who brings sudden death. Moweno is the goddess of plenty. She is believed to carry pebbles and grains of paddy in a bag. When someone asks her for a gift, she gives him either one pebble or a couple of grains, so that his fields consequently yield much produce and his cows many calves. Another goddess is known as Telepfu. Unlike the goddess of plenty, she is mischievous like the Greek god, Puck. She carries away people, and after making them senseless, hides them somewhere. They can recover consciousness again only when found by their relations. Then there Tsukho and Dzurawu, the dwarf god and goddess of hunting, who favour hunters, when supplicated, with game. An interesting god is Tekhu-rho the god of tigers. He avenges the death of a tiger or leopard whom a man has killed. It is believed that the dead animal tells the god the name of the man who has killed him. In order to prevent the wrath of the tiger-god, the hunter puts a wooden stick as wedge between the joints of the tiger to keep them apart, and immerses the head into the water of a stream, so that the dead tiger can't tell the name of his killer. Another god, Metsimo guards the approach to heaven, much like St. Peter of the Christians, and Ayepi is a fairy believed to inhabit houses and confer prosperity. In fact most things which are difficult to understand are supposed to be possessed by spirits.

The concept of future life is one with all the good things of life on earth concentrated—a lot of hunting, drinking and feasting. When the Angami male dies, it is believed his spirit enters a narrow passage where the Metsimo bars his way. If he is able to get through, he enters heaven, but if the Metsimo overpowers him instead, his soul hovers between heaven and earth along with those of still born infants and warriors killed in battle whose bodies have remained untraced.

The souls of dead men retain some connection with their earthly existence. Thus on death, the deceased's hunting horn is hung at its usual place, filled with liquor, in case he may come back for a drink!

While worship of ancestors and nature worship exist, the worship of a God in the ceremonial sense, like having His image in a place like a temple and paying obsequence to it, is not prevalent. Instead, rites and sacrifices are widely practised. These are supervised by certain important officials who thus have a significant place in the Naga community. The most important official is the Kemovo. He directs all public ceremonies in the villages, and fixes the days on which they will be held. He is a descendant in the direct line of the founder of the village, and the office is hereditary from generation to generation. Then there is the pitsu who is the oldest man living in the village, and the Zhevo who performs the genna ceremonies (taboos) in the case of sickness. The officials connected with agricultural operations are the Tsakro, the old man who begins the sowing, and unless he does so no one in the village can sow the fields, and the Lidepfu, the old woman who carries out the ceremonial reaping of the harvest which starts the reaping operations in the village. The two receive some paddy as payment for their services, but they can't work on their own fields for thirty days before carrying out the ceremony.

The ceremonies attending the taboos are numerous, and it would be tedious to recount them all. Most of them are attended by sacrifices, drinking, singing and dancing. These ceremonies are connected with prohibitions and taboos, with superstition as their base. The word used in the Naga language is 'genna' and this includes three different kinds of taboos viz. *kenna*, which is a prohibition applied to the individual, *penna*, taboo relating to the community or class as a whole, and *nanu* which differs from the *penna* in the period of prohibition, which is longer in the case of the *nanu* than in the *penna*. These taboos are attended by the carrying out of the rituals and ceremonies at which the aforementioned officials variously preside. These rituals are given great importance and have a deep religious significance. Some of them are meant for individuals and families, while others are for the community as a whole. Of the latter kind are the ceremonies to ensure health and well-being of the community to mark the transplantation and harvesting of the paddy, to protect crop from hail,

to honour the dead ancestors, and so forth. The individual gennas are of two kinds. The first are the ones whose performance is obligatory, for example those attendant on birth, marriage and death, and the other kinds are the ones which are optional and generally performed for gaining social status in the community. These latter ones are expensive, for to carry them out offerings of grain and sacrifice or animals are made and very often costly ceremonial dresses are worn while performing them.

Apart from these gennas which act as palliatives to taboos, there are religious ceremonies which accompany birth, marriage, death, and and so forth. When an Angami women is about to give birth to a child she breaks the bead necklace which she wears as an ornament, letting the beads spill over the ground. She casts away all her clothes except for one garment which she wraps close round her. She is segregated from the household after delivery, and is fed on rice beer and the meat of a hen. After five days she leaves the child-bed and goes out by the back door, taking the cooking utensils with her. These she throws away behind the house. On the sixth day she takes a grown-up child of her husband's clan and of the same sex as the baby and fetches water from a water place and bathes the baby with it. Sprays of a plant called *tsöheh* are put on the baby's forehead and she breaks the twig first on the right and then on the left side of the infant. On the eighth day she takes the baby to the house of some family in which there have recently been no deaths. The housewife gives a little rice beer to the baby to sip. On the ninth day the parents take the baby to the field where they symbolically work for some time, and while returning, bring with them two branches of the alder tree. This concludes the birth ceremonies.

Piercing of the child's ears or giving it a name are not attended by ceremonies. But on the later occasion sometimes pieces of twigs of the shrub called *chiese* are sliced into four bits. Two of these pieces are dropped on two already on the ground. If they stay up and don't touch the ground, a suitable name is given.

The ceremonies of marriage have already been described in the chapter on Laws and Customs. In the case of death the corpse is washed by a boy or girl of the sex corresponding to that of the dead person. The deceased's closest friend brings meat, rice, and rice beer, for the inmates of the dead man's house, for no food is cooked by them that day. The body is washed and covered by a piece of cloth. His ceremonial dress is placed above, and near his head a basket containing grains of rice, millets, and other gram, along with rice beer and the cup of the man from which he drank it. Next day the relations of the dead man bring cattle, and the official presiding at the ceremony makes a wound in each animal after which it is killed and divided among those present, giving the better share to the persons who were nearest to the dead man. Meanwhile there is loud mourning and lamenting in the house. After some time the deceased's father-in-law or a friend, if he has none, goes and stands on the left side of the body. If it is a man who has died, he places a spear at the right of the corpse, if a woman, a black cloth. He snips off a lock of the hair of the dead person. The coffin is brought and a little dry grass burnt in it, after which the body is laid inside. Along with the body are placed a fire-stick, a spear or two, a young chicken and the bitter seed *gadzost*, used for killing leeches. The dead man's soul will be chewing the *gadzost* seed when he encounters the spirit which guards heaven's gate, otherwise the spirit will not let him pass. In the case of a woman, apart from the seed and the chicken, a new petticoat, her other clothes, and a sickle are buried. The grave is dug in front of the house or by the side of a village path.

Next day the kindred of the dead man come and feast at his house. After wearing ceremonial dresses they shout and leap by the grave and challenge the spirit who has taken the dead man away from them. Thereafter they put the skulls of the killed animals over the grave along with ornaments, weapons, shields and clothes, and in case of a dead woman a basket containing her spinning gear along with a frame on which strings of different colours are stretched.

On the second day, after the burial, cooked rice and salt

tied up in seventeen separate piece of banana leaves. These are buried on the fourth day outside the house. On the fifth day the plates and drinking cup of the dead man are tied up in a string and hung inside the house. These are given to the man's close friends after thirty days. Ten days after a cock is killed and the meat divided equally between the inmates of the house.

The belief is that something leaves the body at death. This is supposed to be some kind of winged insect like a bee or a butterfly. Often the Nagas make a hole in the roof of the dead man, so that this insect-spirit may have ease in getting out. The ghost of the dead person is believed to be his exact image at the time of his death—with the same scars, birth-marks, tattoos and so forth.

The Tangkhuls believe that when the spirit of the dead come to heaven's gate the Deity there tries to keep them all out. But if a buffalo has been sacrificed at the dead man's ceremonial feast, the mighty ghost of the powerful beast overcomes the Deity and forces the gates open for the spirit of the dead man. But if no such sacrifice has been made the spirits have to linger at heaven's gate and await the arrival of the spirit of a man who has been rich enough to afford a buffalo sacrifice. When such a spirit arrives and the gate is forced open, they too take advantage of it and rush in.

Heaven's Deity judges the spirits and distinguishes the good from the bad. The ideas of rewards and punishments differ from tribe to tribe. Some believe that the good spirits are made to take a neat and clean road, and the evil ones a road full of worms and dreadful things. Others think the good spirits go to a heaven above, and the bad ones in the bowels of the earth. Yet others conceive of various mansions to house different kinds of spirits—those who have died in battle, the women who have been victims of childbirth and so forth. The Kabuis believe that the spirits go to the nether world where their ancestors meet them, and the life they lead there is a repetition of their lives on earth. If they were poor on earth, they remain poor

here too, and if rich, they have wealth. Heaven for the Kabuis is, in fact, an exact replica of the material world. Belief in re-birth exists among the Nagas. Often a baby is believed to be the exact image of some dead relation.

The Khasis do believe in a supreme God, although their concept about Him is vague and uncertain. They do not worship any images of the Deity, rather propitiate spirits by sacrifices and other such means. This propitiation is carried out by Khasi priests known as lyndoho. They believe in a future state after death. Those whose funeral ceremonies have been performed according to the prescribed manner go to the house of God in the garden of which there are immense groves of betel nut trees, and the departed soul enjoys the pleasure of chewing betel-nuts continually. Accordingly the expression used for the departed soul is 'One who is eating betel-nuts in God's house.' The spirits of those whose funeral ceremonies have not been satisfactorily performed, roam over the world as animals, birds kinds or insects.

Man was created by God and put on the earth. But to His dismay God found that the evil spirit destroyed man. So God created a dog first and then man. The dog kept watch, and prevented the evil spirit from carrying out his work of destruction.

Apart from belief in a God, the Syntongs have faith in a number of household deities. These are said to have sprung from a woman of the name of Ka Taben. She went to various places along with her children, offering herself as a household goddess. First she went to the plainsmen, then to the Khasis, the people of the Jantia Hills, and finally to the house of the Siems. The Siems accepted her and assigned her children various responsibilities. One was to look after the young unmarried folk, one to supervise those engaged in daily labour and trade, one to befriend young men who went to fight, one went to the forest and became a forest goddess.

Many spirits are worshipped by the Khasis—the god of the States, the god of water, the god of wealth, and so forth. The

minor spirits (mainly evil), are the spirit of malarial fever, of cholera, the fever devil and so on. As among the Nagas, the belief exists that diseases and epidemics are caused by these spirits and some of the ceremonies are those meant to appease them. Fowls or goats are sacrificed to the disease spirits, but an exception is made in the case of small-pox and the god responsible for this is not appeased.

Sacrifices are made also to the spirits which are believed to dwell in rivers, trees, hills and these are worshipped as deities of nature. For example, before the start of fishing in a certain area, goats are sacrificed to Punatit, the river goddess. It is said that once the goddess took the form of a crocodile and did not let anyone enter the river, so she was appeased by offering a goat. Since then this became a custom. The hill god of the Rableng Hill is propitiated by the sacrifice of a he-goat and a cock, while that of the Symper Hill is offered a he-goat or a bull.

Under the control of the Supreme God there are numerous gods and goddesses who are beneficial or harmful to human being according to whether sacrifice has been offered them or not. Thus if illness strikes someone, it is supposed to be the result of the wrath of some spirit, and the particular spirit which has caused the illness is identified by certain acts like the breaking of an egg or examination of the entrails or viscera of animals. Chopping off the head of a cock is supposed to be a particularly conciliatory gesture and the cock is spoken of by Khasis as 'the son of god who loses his neck for the sake of man'.

The breaking of an egg is a very important omen, and before a Khasi undertakes anything of importance he always breaks an egg. The egg is smeared with red earth and with the repetition of mantras, is dashed upon a wooden board. The position of the bits of egg-shells which scatter on the board determine the favourableness or otherwise of the omens. Another method is to hold an egg wrapped up in a plantain leaf with the narrow end upward, and pressing down another egg on it. If the end of the egg which is pressed breaks at



once it is a good omen, but if it remains unbroken it is believed a god dwells in it, and the omen is bad. A lime-case is sometimes used. It is held in the hands, and if on asking a question it swings the answer is 'yes', if not, the answer is 'no'. Other articles used as oracles are the bow, cowries, or grains of rice. Sometimes two leaves are dropped on a stone, or in water, and the position of the leaves signifies whether the gods are favourable or not.

The various ceremonies of birth, marriage and death, are performed by priests usually the *langdoh*. There is no family *purohit*, and the head of the family performs the household ceremonies. The *langdoh* must be assisted by a priestess. It is she who collects all the articles for the sacrifice, and in fact plays the prominent part. The *langdah* holds office for life, and when he dies a successor is chosen after an elaborate ceremony in which there are sacrifices and ceremonial dancing by the new *langdoh*.

The marriage ceremonies of the Khasis have already been described in the chapter on marriage. The ones following birth and death are as follows.

On the birth of a child the umbilical cord is cut by a sharp bamboo splinter, never with a knife. A worship offering eggs to a deity is performed after cutting off the cord. The name of the child is given next morning. Liquor is poured from a gourd, a little at each time. Several names are repeated, and the one uttered when the last drop remains in the gourd is that given to the child. If the child is a male, a bow and three arrows are placed near him, and if a female a cane head-strap for carrying burdens. Several more ceremonies follow and powdered turmeric mixed with rice flour and water is applied to the right foot of the parents and the child, but to the left foot of the friends and relations present. Among the Syntengs there is a variation of the ceremony. The eldest aunt performs it. A basket of eggs is placed in the middle of the room. The aunt breaks an egg and taking two sticks drops them to the ground, and asks 'what should I name the child,' Someone

suggests a name. If the sticks fall uncrossed another egg has to be broken, and two sticks again dropped. This goes on, each time a name being called out after the breaking of an egg. The name announced when the sticks finally fall across each other, is the one given to the child.

The placenta is preserved till the naming ceremony is concluded. Then the pot containing it is waved over the child's head and hung up on a tree. After two or three months the ears of the child are bored and ear-rings called *ki shashkor lawbet* (ear-rings of the great-grand mother) are put in them.

The death ceremonies of the Khasis are not intricate, and involve sacrifices of birds and animals at each stage. When a person dies a family member bends down and utters the name of the deceased thrice. If no answer comes it is concluded that the man is dead, and the family begin to lament loudly. The body is bathed in warm water from three earthen pots, and after dressing it in white cloth, laid on a mat. An egg is placed on the stomach and nine fried grains of corn tied round the head with a string. A cock is sacrificed, the idea being that it will enable the spirit to seek a path for itself. If the deceased is a woman, a bull or a cow is sacrificed. A small basket containing pieces of the sacrificed animal is hung over the corpse's head and a plate with eatables, betel-nuts and a jar of water placed near the head of the corpse, the idea being that it will provide food for the departed spirit when he is hungry. While the corpse remains in the house, guns are fired and flutes played. On the day the body is taken out, pigs are sacrificed and copper coins thrown for the poor to collect. If the deceased is a man the bier is tied crossways with cotton or silk cloth, and if a woman in the form of parallel strips. The corpse is laid on the pyre with the head to the west and feet to the east. After the cremation, the bones are collected and put into a cairn along with three pieces of hard yolk of an egg, three loaves of bread, the leg of a fowl and the lower jaw-bones of the animals killed in sacrifices. Betel-nuts and eatables are put on top of the cairn. Early next morning the relations of the deceased go to cairn to see if any footprints are visible

for it is thought that by observing these prints future events can be predicted. All this time the front door of the deceased's house is kept open for the three nights lest the spirit of the departed man may like to revisit the place. When the three nights are over, the family go to bathe and all the clothes and mats in the house are given a washing. After a month a pig or a fowl is sacrificed.

There are minor variations in these ceremonies from one clan to another, and in case the death has taken place due to accident or by violence, like murder and the like, some other customs apart from the normal ones are also followed.

The Garos believe that the world was created by a certain superior spirit whom they call by the name of Tatara Rabuga. In this work he was assisted by two lesser spirits of the name of Nostu-Napantu and Machi. Tatara Rabuga is considered the greatest spirit of all, and particularly responsible for curing wasting and persistent diseases. The way in which he is believed to have created the world is as follows. When he desired to create the world, he sent Nostu-Nopantu in the form of a woman to carry out the task. But she found there was no dry place for her to put her food and so she made her abode on a spider's web stretched over the water. Tatara-Rabuga gave her some sand to do the job but the particles would not stick together. So Nostu found it useless and sent a big crab to get some clay from under the water. The crab, however, failed. Then she sent a small crab, but he was too frightened. Finally she sent a beetle who got the clay, and with this she fastened the earth. But the Earth was too wet to walk upon, so Nostu prayed to her mater Tatara-Rabuga to help her dry it. For this Tatara placed the sun and moon in the sky and the wind, so that between them they dried the Earth. Thereafter vegetation was made to spring up, and the first animals were created. Of these the hulock ape was the first, and this was because he could utter loud cries and prevent the Earth from going to sleep and thus cause a lull in her productiveness. Among the water creatures the frog was first created, and he proclaimed by his loud croaks, the coming of rain. After the

frog, fishes were created. Then after all these Tatara-Rabuga sent a goddess, named Susime down to Earth to prepare it for being inhabited by men. Two dwarfs named Bonejasku and his wife Jane-Gando cleared the forest and made an offering of pumpkins to the Creator spirit as a result of which he gave them an offering of rice crop. From then, human beings had rice as a staple food.

The rising and the setting of the sun are explained by saying that the earth is a thin and flat body and Tatara has ordained that the sun will shine on the upper and lower surfaces by turns. In another tale the sun and the moon are described as brother and sister. Sister moon was brighter and more lovely than the sun, and brother sun became jealous. In his rage he flung some mud on his sister's face. Instead of washing herself, the sister complained to her mother, who enraged to see her thus unwashed, decreed as a punishment that the mud should ever stick to her face. Since then the moon is less bright than the sun. The stars are believed to be spirits who rule the seasons and the years. The morning star warns the cocks that day is about to break and they should start crowing so that people might wake up. The evening star denotes that it is time to shut the fowls for the night. An interesting explanation is given for a falling star. Once a star of the name of Dosadit-Mingitir married a clod of earth. Thereafter he warned another star but even today he has not forgotten his old love and sometimes comes down to earth to see her !

As has been said, the Garos worship a number of spirits, deities and natural forces. Among the spirits, benign and evil, apart from Tatara-Rabuga, the creator, there are Chorabudi, protector of crops, to whom sacrifices are offered to cure pain in the ear or boils, Saljong the god of fertility, Goera the god of strength, who causes thunder and lightning, Kalkame (Goera's brother) the spirit who has control over men's lives, Susime who gives wealth but at the same time is also responsible for causing blindness and lameness, Asima-Dingsuma (Susime's mother), whose name it is considered unlucky to

take and Nawang the evil spirit who devours the souls of men when they go to purgatory.

The Garos also believe that natural phenomenon like the occurrence of thunder, lightning, rain, wind, earthquakes, tides and eclipses are all governed by some spirit, and they offer sacrifices to them in order to avert disaster.

Lightning, for example, is the result of the spirit Goera flashing his sword, and thunder is the noise he makes when angry. The explanation given for earthquakes is queer. The earth is a flat square suspended by four ropes from the sky. On each of the ropes there lives a squirrel who gnaws it. Four blind men armed with bamboos stand out each corner to drive away the squirrel, but sometimes a squirrel is too fast for them and gives a bite which cause the earth to shake. Another version is that the flat square earth is supported on four legs like a table, and when a mouse runs up and down any of these, an earthquake results.

Eclipses are caused by the spirit Nawang who swallows the sun and the moon. The Garos beat drums to drive him off. When there is an exceptionally violent wind the Garo will take a sword and slash at it outside his house saying the while 'Go, go away to the mountain pass and the deep ravine.'

In order to invoke rain, or in case of severe cold, sunshine ceremonies are performed on a piece of land specially set apart for the purpose. To pray for rain the village folk go to a big rock, each with a gourd of water. The priest recites a supplication and sacrifices a goat, smearing the rock with its blood. After this all the men pour their gourd-fulls on the poor priest. To invoke sunshine, fires are lit round the rock, and a goat or fowl sacrificed.

Sacrifice of animals and birds is frequently made in the observance of religious ceremonies. There are sacrifices for the cure of minor ailments, such as sacrificing birds, generally a fowl or duck, and smearing the altar or bamboo pole with the blood. There are more elaborate sacrifices for serious

ailments. A general belief among the Garos is that every person will fall seriously ill twice in his life time once in his childhood and once when he is an adult. The former illness is called *bimarima* and the second *kambepea*. It is believed that some people will die of these illnesses and others will recover. The disease may take any form like cholera, dysentery, small-pox and so forth. When such a serious disease occurs, a sacrifice is made near a stream from where the ill person used to fetch water. The feathers of the bird are plastered on a bamboo, and blood smeared on a sacrificial bamboo frame. A string is fastened to the frame and carried over to the sick man's house so that the other end of the string is in the room in which he lies. The idea is that if the spirit of the patient leaves the body in the event of his death, the prayers of his friends and relations might induce it to return, and in that case the stretched string will facilitate the home coming.

Besides these individual ceremonies there are ones observed once a year by the community as a whole, as a safeguard against epidemics, mishaps and dangers from wild beasts. This consists of sacrificing a goat and thereafter a bamboo-rat or *langoor*. There are religious observances preceding cultivation of land, sowing and harvesting, for the Garos are mainly agriculturists. The ceremony of harvesting is the most elaborate and impressive one. The headman of the village foots most of the bill. A curious feature is the making of the replica of a horse with plantain stem for the body and pieces of bamboo for the head and legs, sometimes a more elaborate affair. This is put on the floor of the headman's house and the guests sing and dance round it the whole night. Next morning the 'horse' is launched in the water of some stream and carried away by it. After the harvesting there is another ceremony following the storage of the grain into granaries.

Then there are ceremonies for placating the malignant

spirits which cause damage to crops. These spirits are known as Bang, Rakasi and Miskal. The method of keeping the Bang away, is interesting. A cylindrical cage is made and filled up with household articles of daily use like spoons, pots and so forth. This is placed along the path leading to the village, and a fowl offered ■ sacrifice. Another spirit which is believed to destroy crops is Chual, which takes the form of a streak of lightning, though it is not indential with lightning.

The office of priest is not hereditary as in other Assamese tribes. Anyone who is qualified for the job, and has the necessary constitution of mind to utter mantras and incantations, can become a priest. The job, however, is a hard one, and the remuneration for it poor, and is not so greatly prized as the priestly office generally is. Divination is prevalent among the Garos, as in other tribes. One method is for the priest to hang down a small piece of string from one end of a bow. The loose end is rubbed on the body of the sick man, and the bow held up by the priest, who at the same time begins to chant the names of the spirits likely to have caused the illness. It is believed that when the right spirit is named the bow begins to quiver and sacrifice can then be offered to this spirit. Another way is to drop grains of rice, one by one, into a cup of water, while calling out the name of the spirits. When the correct spirit is named two floating grains will touch each other.

The regular ceremonies of birth, marriage and death, are observed by the Garos. When a women is about to be confined her husband makes a sacrifice of a bull, goat, or fowl, according to his means. The women attending, scatter rice grains on the floor of the house, at the same time abjuring the evil spirit to depart. If there is any abnormal delay in the delivery, a goat ■ brought and its body placed into contact with the women. At the same time the priest blows out a fine spray of water from his mouth over her, and wishes her 'good luck'.

After birth a bamboo thrust down through the roof and into the floor in the room where the woman is, forms a kind of altar. The mother and baby are given a bath in some stream, and then the baby's head shaved leaving a small patch of hair, and prayers are offered at the improvised altar. The father then goes up on the roof, and sacrificing a fowl, lets the blood fall down the bamboo pole. The bamboo is then split up by the priest and thrown away, and he and the father cook the fowl and eat it. The beak and crop of the fowl are placed on a plantain leaf and offered to the gods. Often small figures of bamboo are placed on the roof of the house to placate the spirit known as Tongrengma when a child cries a lot after birth. There is another popular belief that if on the day a child is born, anyone in the village goes near the fields the crop will wither. Omens are consulted on the birth of the child to ascertain his future prospects.

The ceremonies of marriage are given under that head. Death is attended by many elaborate ceremonies. The Garos believe that after death the spirit has to go on a long journey to Mangru-Mangram, the spirit above. For this just the kind of arrangements have to be made as for one undertaking a journey on earth. The animals offered as sacrifice provide the needful food for the spirit. Mangru-Mangram is a kind of purgatory through which all spirits, good and bad, have to pass. On arrival he inquires about his ancestors and lives with them. But life in the land of spirits is no pleasure, and the aim is to get release from it as soon as possible. It is believed that during this journey a monster, Nawang, lies in wait. He asks each spirit what he has done on earth and what he has brought with him. This demon is covetous of brass rings, and the spirit which is well-equipped with these, throws them on the ground, and escapes while the monster is busy picking them up. This is the reason why the Garos wear such a large number of brass rings in their ears. Having finally arrived, the spirit continues living in Mangru-Mangram till such



time as he is required to inhabit another body born on the earth. Spirits can be reborn as animals or creatures like birds and flies, if sins have been committed by them. For example if one commits suicide, it is believed he will become a beetle which feeds on the sap of the plant from which the fibre which made the rope by which he hanged himself, is made. The spirit of a murderer is condemned to live for seven generations, at an isolated peak on the south-east of the Garo Hills called Chikmang, before it can return to earth.

The Garos cremate their dead bodies, except in the case of a leper, who is buried. The body is washed with liquor if it is that of a headman, and with ordinary water in other cases. A coin is placed in the dead man's palm to pay for his journey to Mangru-Mangram. Animals are sacrificed to provide food on the way. The corpse is laid for two days and a night before being burnt, watch being kept over it by women and the priest. The women wail and recite the good and evil deeds of the dead man, keeping time by banging on the floor with a piece of wood.

If the deceased was an important man, the young men of the village dress up as wild beasts like tigers, bears and monkeys, and imitating the voice of these animals, dance about and shout, so that the mourners may keep awake and look after the body carefully. A bull is kept near the place of cremation, and when the body is about to be fully consumed by the flames it is slaughtered, so that its spirit may go with the dead man to the next world. A dog may be killed so that it can act as a guide. Sometimes instead of these sacrifices a slave is tied to the leg of the corpse from the day the man died to the moment of his cremation, and is then freed from slavery. On the morning after the cremation, the widow, widower, or near relation go to the pyre and cook some rice, prawns and an egg, on the embers. This food, too, is meant for the dead man's spirit. The bones remaining behind are collected and

buried outside the deceased's house. Over this spot a shrine consisting of a bamboo enclosure filled with earth and surmounted by a white canopy is set up.

The Mikirs have no temples, shrines, or images of God. They sometimes have belief in amulets called *bor*. These are pieces of stone or metal, obtained by accident, which are believed to bring luck. But the *bors* are not objects of worship. Though there is no concept of an almighty Supreme Power, the Mikirs have a number of gods whom they worship at different times and places, and different kinds of animals are sacrificed to them. Arnam-Kethe (the great god) and Peng are household gods propitiated to get rid of illness. Pigs are sacrificed to the former and goats to the latter. Hempu and Mukrang are believed to own all the Mikir people. Fowls and goats are sacrificed to them, and as among the Hindus Shri Ganesha, so among the Mikirs Hempu must be invoked first in every religious ceremony and sacrifice. Rek-anglong is the hill god, to whom a fowl and a goat are sacrificed once a year, and Arnam paro is known as the 'hundred god' because he receives a hundred portions of rice, betel-nut, and the red bark (spathe) of the plantain tree. A white goat or a white fowl are sacrificed to him.

Apart from these main gods there are others whom it is necessary to propitiate to avert diseases. For example Ajo-ase is the cholera deity, Chomang-ase the fever god, and So-meme the god to whom barren women pray for offspring.

Natural features like mountains, waterfalls, pools, streams, boulders, and the sun and moon, are considered divine, though not propitiated. Trees and animals, however, are not worshipped. Peculiar is the god Lame-aphu (the master of speech). Men who wish to win a case in court sacrifice a young cock to him secretly at night in a lonely spot.

Like other tribes, the Mikirs also believe in divination,

witchcraft, charms, oaths and ordeals. Long-continuing sickness is believed to be the result of witchcraft, and therefore a diviner is necessary to discover and to drive out the particular spirit by whom the sick man is possessed. For ordinary ailments an ordinary diviner will do, but an expert is needed for the more complex ones. The former (the ordinary which doctor) is called *sang-kelang abang*, and he is usually a man, while the expert known as *lodet-pi* is mostly a woman. Grains of rice, cowries, and an egg smashed on an egg-board (similar to the khasi practice), or a long handed iron *dao* known as a *nok-jir*, are used. The rice grains are grouped in lines or in other forms and counted in couples. If odd numbers predominate it is a good omen. Cowries are spread out, and if those with the slit portion upwards are more, it is considered good. The egg divination is much like the Khasi ceremony, but in the case of Mikirs heaps of mud are placed on the board each signifying a god, and the one with the largest and longest splash of the yolk is the one to be propitiated. The *nok-jir* is held upright in the hand, and it is believed that if the correct name of the spirit oppressing the sick man is pronounced it will begin to vibrate. All these acts of divination can be performed by the ordinary person. The *lodet-pi* is aware of the spirit by some kind of divine intuition. She yawns all the time and begins to call out the names of the gods after being soused with a customary gourd of rice beer. Thus inspired, she indirectly denotes the name of a spirit responsible.

Charms are much used by the Mikirs. For stomach-ache they rub some mud on the abdomen while uttering a mantra, for rheumatism a castor oil leaf on the affected place. Oaths, like butting dust on the head and saying, 'May I be like this dust if I speak a lie', are used. A man dips a copper ring in water and drinks the water saying, 'May the tiger catch me', (being killed by a tiger being considered a most inauspicious death). Another form of oath is, 'May I be melted like molten copper'.

Festivities are held on the occasion of sowing and harvesting. At the former goats are sacrificed and the gods are invoked thus : 'Help us O gods. Send no tigers or diseases. Keep our crop plentiful and our health good. We beseech you and only you. 'At the harvest festival there is a little dancing as an exception, for among Mikirs generally dancing is held and at funerals. Fish and beer are consumed, but no animals are killed. Sometimes festivity is held (called Rongkerpi) in which the whole mauza takes part. This may be for such purposes as driving away a man-eating lion or tiger, or averting such general calamity.

The Mikirs believe that after death if the funeral ceremonies are correctly performed, one goes to the kingdom of Yama. If the death ceremonies are not performed the spirit of the dead person does not gain admittance into it. When death occurs, the old women of the village wash the body and lay it. The parentage of the man is announced, and a chant ensues, the purport of which is that the deceased will meet his ancestors and stay and eat with them. Rice and a boiled egg, especially prepared for the spirit of the dead man, is placed twice a day beside the body, and this goes on till the holding of the funeral ceremony. After the body is laid, the lads of the village are summoned. They play on the drum and dance in pairs, and thereafter hold hands and dance around. This goes on for three successive nights. The beer is meanwhile prepared. A young girl acts as the carrier of the body, but she only does this symbolically, and carries on her back a gourdful of beer. At midnight the people of the village, lavishly dressed, collect at the dead man's house. They dance with shields and then in a circle, joining their hands. The girls join in holding to the lads by their coat lapels, while the boys take hold of them by their belts. The dance, with variations, goes on next day too. A pig is tied, and the history of the funeral service chanted near it. Then it is sacrificed and eaten with rice, a piece being set aside for the dead man. More sacrifices follow-

that of a cock, a pig, ducks and pigeons, and finally the body is laid on the pyre. When this is lighted, the women sing a song describing the dead man's life, the fact that he will now go to see his ancestors, and so forth. Some of the lads dance while the women are singing. When the body is burnt the bones are tied up in a cloth and a little house erected over the mound where they are buried. Some food is placed on a flat stone for the spirit of the dead man.

The Kacharis do not have any image to worship, or temple. They, however, believe the earth, sky and air are pervaded by spirits known as 'Modai' which, more often than not, act against the interests of mankind. This being so, these spirits are to be propitiated by frequent offerings of animals killed in sacrifice, and grain.

The Kachari deities fall into two different categories, viz, household gods and village gods. The household gods are worshipped in individual houses by the family, while the village gods are worshipped outside at some central place in the village, often near a grove of bamboo trees. Among the household gods the most prominent is Bathan who looks after the interests of the family. He is represented by the *stju* tree outside the house. Inside, an altar is made to Song Raja at which the women make offerings particularly during their menses period. These offerings are later laid by the root of the *stju* tree. The Kacharis naturally treat this particular tree with reverence. Next to Bathau is his consort Mainao who is guardian of the rice fields. Since the Kacharis are primarily agriculturists she is very important to them, though unlike her husband she is not represented by any emblem. She is worshipped specially at the harvesting period, and receives offerings of large number of eggs. The other household deities are not of such importance. There is the Song Raja already mentioned, a favourite for worship by women, and Bura Bagh Raja-the name given to the tiger god, who is considered to be king of the woods, and feared as well as worshipped.

The village gods are adopted from the Hindu ones. The main ones are Kubera, Mero raja, Bura gosain and Sila Rai. Some sixty-five names have been mentioned by Maulvi Mahibuddin Ahmad, who has written a valuable paper on the subject.

A number of *pujas* are offered to the village gods mainly to coincide with the harvestings of the three rice crops. However these are not so much religious in nature as occasions of merry-making with a lot of consumption of rice beer and sacrifices of animals.

The Kacharis do not have any priestly class, but all religious offices are discharged by village elders known as Deoris. The office is not hereditary and anyone who is prominent in the village can qualify. Another official is the Ojha who carries out divination by cowries or shells. These officials are able to deal with ordinary ailments, but as for the Mikirs, there are special women agents known as Deodani to find out the spirit causing serious diseases. Accompanied by the music of cymbals the Deodani works herself up into a frenzy. A goat is brought and its head cut off with one blow. This is the climax of the divination ceremony, and the priestess disclosing the name of the offending spirit, he is appeased by offerings of pigs, goats and so forth, and all round feasting follows, the expenses being borne by contribution of all those participating.

There are the usual ceremonies attending birth, the naming of the child, marriage and death. On the birth of a child the umbilical cord must not be cut by any instrument of iron or steel. Thin hard bamboo strips are used instead and the cord is cut by degrees, there being seven cuts in case of a girl and five for a boy. The mother is held to be unclean for a period of six weeks or a month, the ceremonial uncleanness being ended by the sprinkling of the shanti-jal (water of peace).

The naming of the child takes place immediately after birth,

The names follow the name of day or the month in which the child happens to be born or express some peculiarity noticed in the newly born like 'the weeper', 'the voracious eater' and so forth. Or they follow the common Hindu names like Ganga, Triveni, Rama, and Sita. The marriage ceremonies are described in the appropriate chapter. The death ceremonies are simple. After death the head is anointed with oil and combed carefully. It is called in all the finery possessed by the dead person and a shroud of new cloth placed on it. A meal of fowl or pigeon is prepared and offered ceremonially to the dead person a dozen times, and then thrown away. Both burial and cremation are in vogue, though the latter is considered more correct. This takes place generally near some stream. If the body is buried and has to be carried across a stream, a string is stretched connecting both the banks, lest the spirit desire to come back to revisit its home. In burying the body a hollow reed is extended from the nose and stuck above the ground (the grave is a shallow one) so that the dead person's spirit may be able to breathe. Before placing the body in, friends and relations circumambulate the grave five times in the case of a man, and seven if it is a woman. Some coins are buried with the corpse and the dead person's utensils left on it to be of use to the spirit. A rough thatch is erected to protect the spirit of the dead person from rain and sun.

In cremation the same minor differences are observed between a man's body and that of a woman. In the former case five layers of wood are placed, and in the latter, seven. Friends and relations go round the pyre, seven times for a woman, and five for a man. After cremation the ashes are sheltered by four posts with a cloth roof, again, to protect the spirit.

The domestic festivities are held at the harvesting of rice in the second week of December and at the end of November. The latter one is called 'the driving away of mosquitoes,' because at this period the cold kills most of them. These festi-

vities are accompanied by much gay abandon, drinking of rice beer, dancing and merriment, and have little of the religious and ceremonial element.

There are no tribal festivities, but some of the Kacharis celebrate two of them in January and April each year. These are also occasions for much dancing, drinking and abandonment. Often the April festivity is accompanied by dancing, and licentiousness, and there is much exchange of playful banter.

Although the Hindu influence on the Meitheis of Manipur is noticeable to a very large extent, the system of old also persists. The priest is known as the *matba*, and this is a typical tribal office. There are four orders of spiritual beings. These are the gods of the countryside or of Nature known as *Lam Lai* who control rainfall, the deities of the forest known as *Umanghai*, the lords of the lives of individual people known as *Imung Lai*, and the Tribal Ancestors who practice magic and Nature worship. Besides this a number of other deities are worshipped like the *Sena Mehi* by the *Lois*, the *Imung Lai* by the *Laimaren*, and the Sun god by the people of *Fayeng Lai*. Pigs, dogs, ducks and fowls are offered to them.

The Hindu festivals of *Dusherra* and *Holi* are celebrated with great gusto. Besides these there is the festival of *Laihar oba* (the rejoicing of the gods). In this a number of married women and unmarried girls led by the priestesses, and accompanied by men and boys wearing ceremonial dresses, dance and sing before the god. The women carry fruits and other offerings for the deity. There are also the wandering minstrels who recite ballads of unhappy lovers like that of *khamba* and *Thoibi* in a nasal tone. Then there is the *Chirouba* festival. In this a name-giver titled *chahitaba* (*chahi*=a year, *taba*=to fall), is selected for the coming year in succession to the one of the year past. The *chahitaba* was a peculiar office inasmuch as he was believed to take upon him all the sins of the Raja.



He got many privileges from the State in return. The festival was attended by a ceremony in which the Raja went in a solemn procession to the market place to sacrifice a white goat to the god Khabru. Sometimes a criminal was brought to take upon himself the Raja's sin. The Raja and Rani would, in such a case, bathe in a screened tent, and the water drops fell over the criminal who stood below. Thus the sins of the Raja descended on him. The Raja and Rani would then put on new robes and Rani would then put on new robes and go among the people after which followed a week of seclusion.

Another ceremony was one which was undertaken with idea of obtaining rain. The Raja used to go to a hill of the name of Nongmaiching which has a stone shaped like an umbrella. He would take water from a spring and pour it over the stone. Another ceremony used for this was to drag the Raja's racing boat through the mud and slime in the moat below his castle with the Raja and his father-in-law in the stern. Other rain making ceremonies take the form of men stripping themselves of all their clothes and standing on the roadways cursing each other. Or the women gather in the field at night outside the town, take off all their clothes and throw their pounders into the river. This done, they go home by byways. The Meitheis head of the clan worships the tribal deity whenever rain is required. He has to abstain from meat and from all sexual intercourse before performing the worship. A virgin pours water over his head from a new jar in order to purify him, and thereafter the jar is broken. Each clan has its separate specified sacrifice material. The Ningthaja clan, for example, offer the lotus, the lime, the *mahasher* fish and the small rat known as *mongba*.

The Meitheis priestess is called *maibi*. She speaks in incoherent language, as though possessed by a deity, and dresses herself in white. Her male counterpart is the *maiba*, who is mainly a rain doctor to whom people turn when rain is scarce,

The *pibas* are heads of their clans and are dignified officials, holding a kingly title. They preside over the annual ceremonies connected with the growing of crops. Prominent among them is the Meithei Ningthou who is not only the head of the Ningthaja clan, but also the chief of his people. The Raja also held a special place in the priestly hierarchy.

The names given to the Meitheis have special significance, and embody some peculiarity in the individual, or derived from the profession of the person e.g. meaning tailor, smith, and so forth. There is a family name corresponding to the English surname, next the name given by the astrologer, and thirdly the pet name. For example a studious man may be known as *Lairik-yem-bum* which means a writer. He may be given another name like Ganeshi Lal, and have a pet like Gunes.

Another ceremony is the wearing of the sacred thread. The ceremony of marriage is described in the chapter on Laws and Customs. The death rites are simple. The dead body is thoroughly burnt at cremation and the frontal bone, which is preserved, is later immersed in the sacred Ganga water. The corpse is never carried over the threshold of the main door. Sometimes a hole is cut in a wall, or a small side entrance used.

Though taboos are now a thing of the past among the Meitheis, they existed in the days past. Objects which were taboo were called *namungba*, and differed from clan to clan. For example, to the Ningthaja clan a reed was taboo, to the Moiranga, a buffalo, and so forth. If a man fell off a tree, that variety of tree became taboo to the tribe. Thus the idea of things being taboo or *gezza* existed in a moderate manner among these ancient Manipuri tribe.

The Santhals have no temples. They worship their deities and perform religious ceremonies at some open place towards the end of the village beneath a grove of twenty or twenty-five Sal trees along with those of Ashan and Mowa. A stone representing the deity is placed under three Sal trees which may

be in a row, another under an Ashan tree, and a third under a Mowa tree.

They believe in spirits to whom they give the name bongas. Bongas are generally friendly, but sometimes malevolent and mischievous, their acts causing trouble and misery. The way to get out of the evil influence of these spirits is to propitiate them with prayers and offerings.

The communal priest is called Ato-nocke, and there are various others with more specialised functions like Dehri, the priest of the hunt, Raranic the medicine man who prescribes herbs, Ojha the bonga doctor and Jan-guru the witch detector. The Raranic is a man who prescribes herbs and experiments with animals attacked with diseases. He follows the animal to the jungle and watches the way in which the animal cures himself. He diagnoses by feeling the pulse of his patients much as Vaidas and Hakims do. The Ojha is physician-cum-spirit doctor. He adds magical incantations to herb in effecting a cure. Finding out which spirit assails the sick person is his job, and he drives out the spirit by mantras. When both of these fail, the patient takes the assistance of the Jan-guru, who tells the name of the bonga or witch who is causing all the trouble. The Jan-guru is a man to be reckoned with. If he points out any woman to be a witch she is persecuted in all possible ways, and sometimes even killed. But such occurrences are rare, and if discovered the culprit is considered to be a murderer and gets due sentence.

## Superstition and Folklore

Superstition is part of the beliefs of most people the world over. Whether in the eastern world or in the west, superstitions are part of life and thought, whether it is the inauspicious spitting of salt, walking under a ladder or meeting blind man or a cat cutting across the path, or the lucky finding of a horse-shoe, the seeing of a *nilkantha*, fish or curd. It is so in our modern age, and it was the same too in those ages of colourful tribal pageantry of which we have known in ages past. Superstition formed the hard core of tribal concepts in divination, consultation of oracles and omens, taking of oaths, magic and witch craft, driving out of evil spirits and the propitiation of the deities of nature.

The folk lore of the Assam tribes is so vast that it forms a subject by itself. Only a very little representative amount of it can be included in a book of this kind.

The Angami Nagas believe that if one mars the lower end of a rainbow the 'rainbow's spirit' will devour him. The planting of cactus is believed to cause storms, and if some one lays waste one's property the man whose property it is, will get a stomach ache ! Another belief is that marriages should not be performed in the months in which the swallow birds come. If this is done the girl will not stay happy in her husband's home and run away to her father. Being photographed is considered a calamity, for it is thought the man whose photo has been taken will fall ill and die. As thirteen is the Englishman's unlucky number the one for the Nagas is seven. Seven men will never set out for any work, for it is believed that if they do, one of them is sure to come to misfortune.

It has been mentioned that the Tangkhuls believe that a man who kills a cat will lose his power of speech. Among the Lushais there is a superstition that if there is some ill news in a man's family the salt in his house will not crystallise when he tries to extract it from brine. If the grains in the crop sown by the Kawpoes and Manipuri Nagas are blown off from the ear, they believe it has been bodily 'carried up' by divinity. If the rats invade the granaries or fields and eat the grain, they believe these rats turn into birds and to eat these birds will result in pestilence. If one dreams that he has been attacked by a buffalo, it is believed that some misfortune will come to him. To see a plank means early death, to see mats spread out will mean a good crop to some clans and death to others. To see paper means bad luck of involvement in quarrels. To see a cat means the person will be killed by a tiger or become seriously ill, and to be bitten in a dream by a snake signifies that some one is making him a victim of witchcraft. If one bathes or sees peas and beans in a dream, it is a sign of extreme good luck and prosperity. To build a house means the person will soon die. To dream that a tooth falls out and is lost, or that one has some ear disease, presages early death. To see five in a dream signifies a hot summer which will ruin crops. To see water is luck. To see a crow means trouble and scarcity, and to see a pig means bad luck. To dream of sunrise means death in some cases and long life in others. If one dreams of a fowl being put into a basket it means a parent will die, and if it is a dream in which a hen or a chicken is killed a relation or child's death is presaged. To see a tiger means various things, like a good harvest, or the birth of a son, or an attack of sickness due to some evil spirit. To dream of an earthquake means death, poverty, or scarcity, and to dream of winning a race signifies success in life. The seeing of a dog means the oncoming or an attack of cough or cold. To see one climbing a tree or going through wind and slush is lucky. To talk with a girl in a dream brings bad luck in some cases, and good luck in others. To see a rope brings fortune for some and death to others. Climbing a hill brings good fortune, and going down it presages death.

Just as in other communities and societies, there are omens to be consulted before undertaking a journey. Before a Kabui sets out, he holds up a fowl by the wings. If it crosses the right foot over the left, the omen is good, but if otherwise it is the other way round. There are other omens too. A number of marks are made with a nail or some other such implement on the ground, and they are then counted. An even number of these is considered unlucky. Another way is to cut a piece of green ginger into two bits. One is placed on the ground with the cut side facing up and the other is thrown on it from a little distance. If the two meet it is a good omen. Various omens are considered unlucky while undertaking a journey. For example, the Manipur Nagas consider meeting a mole, the barking of a deer in front, and various cries of certain birds, as unlucky omens. In the villages in which there are wrestling parties which escort the bride to the bridegroom house, the success and duration of the marriage is judged by the results of the wrestling matches. Different tribes have different omens, but none is without them. Thus the Nagas are the slaves of superstition just as much as other races are.

The Nagas have a rich folk lore. There are stories told of actual village feuds in which there is very little of the supernatural element. Then there are legends based on the history of the village or race. In there is a considerable element of the supernatural. These are in the real tradition of story telling and include many fairy tales, animal stories, and stories which recount human fault and foibles, in an interesting manner. Lastly there are the song. Some of the tales relating to Nagas follow :

### **Sweet Revenge**

In the village of Marhema a certain Naga of the name of Akhaji killed a man of Samuma village. Inyapfukovura, the sister of the man so killed, determined to have her revenge. So she took some delicious things to eat and went to Akhaji's house. When he came out, she showed him all the dainty foodstuff, and began to flirt with him. Akhaji yearned for her, for she was young and beautiful, and when he

asked her to lie with him, she said 'Let us eat first and then you may have your desire'. So Akhaji and the girl spread out the dishes and ate to their content, and then he bolted the door and led her to the bed. But Inyapfukovura had a *dao* concealed beneath her petticoat, and when Akhaji was lost in the throes of passion, she cut off his head and hid it under her petticoat.

On the way, Inyapfukovura met Akhaji's parents, who asked her if she had seen him. 'I have given him to eat' she told them. Then they saw the blood dripping from under her and said 'How is this?' 'There are drops of blood under your petticoat?' Inyapfukovura looked down demurely and said 'I am much ashamed, your son has forced me and taken my virginity, and thus defiled me.' So they let her go, fearing that Akhaji had wronged the girl.

When Inyapfukovura reached her village she put the head on the village gate, for it was forbidden for a woman to carry a severed head inside. She told her elder brother, but he would not believe that she, a woman, could have done this all by herself. Then she took him to the gate and showed him the head, at which he was much pleased and carried it triumphantly inside the village.

### Eve's Village

There is, so say the Angami Nagas, a certain village in which only women live. If any man goes to this village they drive him away, shooting arrows at him from a war bow. The women do no work, and eat much starch and oily stuffs, so that they are sturdy enough to give battle to any male intruders. These women keep only one man in their village with whom they all cohabit. The male children born of the union they put into boiling water and so kill them.

Some people say that they do not have even one man in their midst, and should a man chance to go there, they are so eager to enjoy him that they fall upon him and pull his limbs apart!

**Stupid Bear**

Among the Angami Lhota and Sema Nagas a story is related to depict the stupidity of bears. The bear, they say, builds a platform on a tree and goes to sleep on it. When it rains, all the water falls on him and he gets soaked through and through. Then he gets down says 'This could not be my house, for I had built it so carefully that no rain could have come through.' When he looks up the tree, however, he again sees the platform and says, 'What fool I am; of-course that is the house I built'. And he goes up again. The same process is repeated every time it rains, and so the stupid bear keeps going up and down.

**The Story of the Rat Princess**

Once a farmer who was tilling his field happened to catch a rat. He put the rat into a big box. When he opened the box after a few days, imagine his surprise to see the rat changed into a young and comely girl of overpowering beauty. The farmer thought, if I marry this girl to the greatest man in the world I will soon become rich. With this thought he set out with the girl for the king's palace, for to his mind it was he who was the correct man. But the king said, 'I do not mind marrying her, but if you wish to marry her to the greatest man, you must go to the River, for he can easily carry me away in his current'.

So the man went to the River. But the River said, 'Friend, the Wind is greater than I, for when he blows fast, my waters cannot keep still even if they want to. So he is the right match for this girl.' When the man went to the wind, he said, 'I am certainly not the greatest. The mountain is greater than me. I may try and try but him I can never blow away'.

So the man took the girl to the Mountain. 'There is no doubt about my might', the mountain said, 'but there is another greater still, and he is a mouse. A mouse can pierce my side whenever he likes, and I am helpless to do anything about it'. The man wearily went back to his house, for he had nowhere



else to go. The best advice he could give the girl was to turn again into a mouse, which she did !

### **The Story of the Monkey and the Jackal**

One day a monkey and a jackal met in the forest. 'You are lucky to be a monkey' the jackal said. 'You can climb trees and get tasty fruits to eat.' 'What nonsense' the monkey said, 'I can get only fruits but you can steal into men's houses and get such delicious stuff as rice, meat, and anything you want'. The two determined to get the best food they could, and eat it, to decide the issue, and so both went away.

When they came back the monkey said, 'Give me your food first'. The unwary jackal put the food he had brought in the monkey's hand. The monkey swiftly climbed up a tree and ate it, and refused to give the jackal any of the juicy fruits he himself had brought. The jackal was very angry and went into a thick jungle of wild taros, where the taros were large and tender. The monkey came along and asked "What are you doing ?" 'I am eating some of the Sahib's sweet sugar cane' the jackal said. 'Give me some too' the monkey said 'Oh no' said the jackal, 'the Sahib will be angry. But when the monkey pleaded, he relented and said 'All right go and take some. Peel off the skin and eat it'. The monkey cut a wild taro and ate it. As soon as he had done so, his throat began to itch and his mouth swelled up like a pumpkin so that he could not even talk.

The monkey went to a bee hive and sat there. The jackal came along and the monkey warned him and said 'Don't bite into this hive'. The jackal thought the monkey was stopping him from tasting something good, so he made as if to bite the hive. The monkey restrained him saying, 'Not yet, wait a while' and he went off and hid behind a hill. When he had gone the jackal bit into the bees nest. The angry bees made for him and stung him all over.

The jackal went off to a tank so overgrown with tall grass that the water could not be seen. The monkey came along

and said 'Brother jackal, what are you doing here?' The jackal said, 'I am watching the Sahib's clothes.' The monkey said; I am coming down to join you in the task.'

'You must not' the jackal said, 'the Sahib will be angry'.

'I will come', the monkey persisted, sure that the jackal was restraining him with same purpose. Saying this the monkey jumped down from the tree right into the pond and was drowned.

### **Two Love Songs :**

1. This song of a lover for his beloved is sung while sowing jhum fields and at the ceremony of removing the taboo in Khonoma. Pesekriewu is a girl's name.

It means 'She who will be lamented when she is dead.'

In youth let there be no parting

I will wait for you by the path,

I will gaze from far when my fair beloved

Binds her long tresses;

I will wait for her when she goes to the field at dawn.

I will go past the grazing ground, alone,

In my loneliness I remember her, and send her word

To come to me.

When the sun has set and the moon is in the sky

And lights up our favourite village path,

The path by the memorial stone,

which we will no longer pass when we are dead—

Let us pluck the grass heads, and caress each other,

And be fused in one.

Thus we will pour our cups into the same gourd,

Our love will not be hidden :

We will go together to the fields

Unmindful of those who censure us.

Be not angry with me,

O Pesekriewu

2. The song below is sung by the unsuccessful suitor of a girl of the name of Lozorewu :

Though our villages are apart  
 The herds graze together,  
 Go my love and sit on the stone by the ridge  
 I will join you.  
 Three of your suitors are at the well  
 Picking up pebbles, and dancing :  
 You are the loveliest among women, dear beloved,  
 Your skin is fair, there are brass rings in your ears :  
 There are many lads in the moorung but you my love,  
 Have the name of your true lover on your lips;  
 I am abashed in your presence—  
 All men love you, O Lozorewu,  
 You are the paragon of loveliness.

The Khasis have a considerable amount of folk lore. Their tales tell the stories of rivers, caves, mountains, and so forth. There are wierd tales about the Siem who was a very powerful king among the Khasis. There are others, like the story of Manick Raitong which explains how the bamboo flute, played generally at funerals, came to be used. Only some of the Khasi tales are given here.

#### **Why the Moon ■ Pale :**

Once there lived a woman who had four children, three of whom were girls, and one a boy. The name of the girls were Ka Sngi (The Sun), Kaum (Water), Ka Ding (Fire), and the lad was U. Bynai (Moon). Now the lan U Bynai—the moon, was very wicked and had evil intentions towards his own eldest sister Ka Sngi—the Sun. He was as bright as the Sun, but when he started his incestuous pursuit, his sister got enraged, and said "O wicked man, how dare you have such evil intentions towards me, your sister of the same blood, who has held you in her arms and carried you on her back as a mother does ! I will cover your shameless body with ashes." Saying this she threw some ash on him, and after this the Moon lost his brightness because of having the film of ash on his face. So is he ever since.

### **The Story of Two Hills**

There are two hills called Kyllang and Symper, of whom it is said two gods inhabited them. The god of the one hill had a quarrel with the god of the other. They fought by throwing mud and stone at each other. The god of the Kyllang hill emerged victorious, and so proudly rears his head, while the god of the Symper hill felt humiliated. The hills have holes on their side and the ones on the Symper Hill are big as tanks. It is said that these were made by the God of the victorious hill during the combat.

### **How the Siems of Shillong Came Into Being :**

The Siem of Shillong is a great and powerful chief of the Khasi Hills and known on the 'god kind'. It is said his origin was as follows. There lived a woman in a cave called Marai, near the village of Pomlakrai. She was young and exceedingly beautiful. Many men tried to obtain her, but the cave was so narrow that all their attempts were failed. Then a clever man went to the cave and shower her a flower called 'a-tiew-jalyngkteng' which had an enticing fragrance and loveliness. The women tried to snatch the flower, and the man gradually moved back out of the cave, holding on to it. Soon she was quite out of the cave, in the open. As soon as she left the cave, the man seized her and took her home, where he married her. The woman came to be called Ka Pah Syntiw—'the flower-lured one'. She gave birth to many sons and daughters and after that she went back to the cave and never came out again, despite the entreats of her children and her husband.

Ka Pah Syntiew's children grew in stature and glory. They had all the good and noble qualities desirable in human beings. The people flocked to them and they were impressed to hear that they had been born to wonderful women, who because of her qualities, seemed to be the daughter of the god of Shillong. So they appointed the children, Siems, and they were the ancestors of the Siems of Shillong.

We have seen that the Garos are ■ superstitious a race as the other tribes of Assam. They fear that if the large drum they own, is taken out of the house, misfortune is sure to fall. Also they don't cultivate much lac, despite it's being very paying, because they believe the crop near it will die. There are other such beliefs as well. They consider still pools as abodes of the Bugarik, who is supposed to be a lovely siren who devours men and women. She has lovely waving tresses which float on the current. She has a woman's body and arms, but no legs; and the Garos believe that she kills women to add their hair to her already luxurious tresses ! They also have a great fear of ghosts.

Another superstition is that if a person wishes another to die he snips off some of his hair and clothes, and mixing it with some earth, puts it in a piece of hallow bamboo and offers it to an evil spirit. He then hangs the bamboo over his fire place. His victim is sure to waste away and die.

The Garos also believe in interpreting their dreams to pre-  
-sage events. Death is denoted by a dream of building a house, cutting the hair, of a fallings stone, the breaking of a right back tooth. To dream of catching fish means that the dreamer will get much wealth. A good crop is indicated by some dreams like dreaming of sand, which means a good rice harvest. Dreaming of an old man's white hair means a bumper cotton crop. Litigants believe that if they see themselves wading through a stream, making the water muddy, they will lose the case. Thus superstition and blind belief are part of the Garo's thinking also, as of other tribes.

The Garos have many songs and stories. A number of their centre round two brothers Aual and Gunal and of two girls Awil and Singwil who were sisters and had turned into doves. One of this is related as follows :

The brothers Aual and Gunal were clearing their land when they heard two doves cooing on a nearby tree, and they were speaking like men. The younger brother said Brother do you hear these doves talking in the language of humans ? But Aual,

the elder brother got angry and gave him a beating. A little later, however he too heard the doves and was convinced, they spoke in human speech, and begged Gunal's pardon. Then they set about snaring the doves. When they had caught them Aual cooked his bird and ate it, but Gunal put him in a cage and tended it. One day when Aual and all the people in his house had gone out, the dove who was no other than the girl Singwil, turned into a woman and getting out of the cage swept the house, and cooked the food and then again turning into a dove went inside the cage. When Aual's parents returned they were astonished to see the house swept, and the food cooked. They ate the food and wondered at this. Next day when they went out, the same thing was repeated. So next time when they went, they left Aual to find out. He rolled up a mat round him and made hole for eyes, and watched. But after some time he fell asleep and could not see anything. Then his parents watched, but they too met with the same fate. Finally Gunal took up the vigil, and he cut his toe and rubbed salt into it, so that he would not sleep, but pretended to snore. Singwil came out of the cage and did her usual chore, but when she came towards him, sweeping the floor, he quickly caught her wrist, Singwil tried her best to free herself, but he did not leave her till she agreed to marry him. So the two were married.

The series of the tale continues to show the ensuing between the two brothers. Aual makes attempts on Gunal's life but Singwil foils them. Ultimately Gunal kills Aual, and there is peace.

### **The Bhimiraj Bird and the Rat**

Once upon a time the Bhimiraj and the rat used to comb each other's hair and feathers. The Bhimiraj was careful in his work so he has two lovely feathers on his tail. But the rat was lazy, and he rolled the tail round his fingers and rubbed it roughly. For this reason the rat's tail is round and hairless. Seeing the Bhimiraj's beautiful tail the rat wished to bite it off. So the Bhimiraj flitted from one place to the other every night;

and even now he never sleeps in the same place for long, for fear of the rat.

### **The Crab and the Wagtail**

Once upon a time a crab and a wagtail made a pact of friendship. Soon after an old matchadu\* went to a village to sell monkey meat. The wagtail followed him and whenever he wished to sell the meat, he would say 'Don't buy it; it is monkey meat ! Thus the matchadu was not able to sell his meat anywhere, which put him into a rage. Taking some of his hair he set a trap in his basket, so that when the wagtail perched on it to cry out 'Monkey meat', as usual, he got trapped. The matchadu was greatly pleased and said 'Now my wife and I will take you to the river and offer you as a sacrifice' and then eat you up.'

He went to the river bank and prepared the altar for sacrifice. He fetched his wife and the two of them sat down to perform the sacrifice. The matchadu, however, happened to sit over the crab's hole. The crab came up quietly and pinched the matchadu's leg. The matchadu jumped up and fell over the basket, freeing the wagtail, who flew away into the jungle. Thus the crab saved the wagtail's life and redeemed his friendship.

### **The Lover's Song**

This beautiful song is sung at the Wangala festival by the couples participating. It is in the form of an exchange between a man and a young girl. The man is enamoured of the girl, but fears the risk involved in eloping with her. The traditional mode of address the man's calling the girl 'mother', and the girl addressing him as 'father'. This is only to show respect, and the words should not be taken literally.

### **What He Said**

You are sturdy as a banyan tree, my mother ;

---

\* A matchadu is believed to be an evil spirit who has the power of taking the shape of a man or a tiger as he wills.

Dear, you are like a grain of new-pounded rice.  
 You should have been created before the sun,  
 Blue you are, as indigo newly extracted.  
 In the dark Tur forest there are good and bad trees,  
 And in the Brahmaputra sand, water good and bad.  
 From what motherhood are you, pray ?  
 As one stealthily plucks the *manjingka*\* leave,  
 So I would fain take you for myself :  
 As the parrot of the Bolong tree pecks at the ears of rice,  
 So will I take the nipples of your breasts.  
 Come not near me girl, lest your father and husband  
 blame me  
 Step not on my toes lest we be falsely accused.  
 Weep tears for me love, enough to fill a pot from the bazaar,  
 Beat your breast with a stick of *nahor*\*\* wood,  
 For the crow has flown away to Rajabala  
 And I must follow him to bring white Rice for you.

What she said

Father let us die together,  
 Or run away just you and I.  
 Let us hang ourselves by the same strip of bark,  
 And flee by the same road.

What he said

Through the trampled sesamum we will be chased mother,  
 By our wet foot prints they will surely find us.

What She Said

If you go, and leave me with my stepmother, O father,  
 I will hang myself to the cross beam of the house.

What he said

You are beautiful as a young hen, my mother,

---

\* a creeper whose leaves are cooked and eaten as vegetable.  
 \*\* a tree whose wood is very hard.



shapely as a gourd ;  
 Your breasts are small and lovely,  
 Your thigh white as the *gimbari* tree,  
 your lips as the *mandal* flower,  
 Your eyelids like leaves of the bamboo,  
 O, my queen

The Mikirs have interesting tales and legends. A typical one is the Story of the Frog, which is given below :

One day a big black ant was carrying some rice for his uncle to eat, when a frog blocked his way. The ant pleaded much with the frog to get out of the way, but the frog said, 'I will not move. If you have to go, pass beneath me. There was hardly any space between the ground and the underside of the frog, but because the frog refused to budge, and without the rice his uncle would starve, the ant crept with his load of rice under frog's belly. The frog impeded his going, and the ant suddenly bit him sharply in the loins. In a rage the frog jumped up and landed on the ladder of an old squirrel which broke by his weight. The squirrel became angry and broke the stem of a tree on which a gourd grew. The heavy gourd fell with a thump on the back of a wild boar. The enraged boar rooted up a plantain tree, which in turn fell on a sparrow's nest and broke it. Thus disturbed, the sparrow flew right into the ear of a deaf elephant, who became angry rooted up a rock, which rolled down and killed the Raja's son.

The Raja wanted to punish the killer of his son, so he held his court and summoned the rock. The rock said, 'Sir how could I help the rolling down. The deaf elephant suddenly uprooted me, and I had to roll down.' The Raja summoned the elephant. The elephant said, 'Lord how could I help it. The sparrow suddenly flew into my ear, and disturbed me so Greatly that I tore the rock'. So the Raja ordered the presence of sparrow. The sparrow said, 'Great King, the plantain tree fell on my nest and I was so overcome with confusion that I flew into the elephant's ear.' The Raja called the plantain tree. 'How could he help it sir ?' The plantain tree said, 'the wild boar uprooted me, so I had to fall.' The Raja

summoned the wild boar who in turn said, 'I was feeding quietly when the gourd fell all at once on my back. I was wild with pain so I tore up the plantain tree.' The king thought it was the gourd who had caused all this trouble and summoned him to answer for himself. The gourd said, 'Sir how could I help falling down when the squirrel severed the stem on which I was hanging?' The king asked the squirrel to make his appearance. The squirrel came and said, 'How could I help it, Lord. The frog jumped on my ladder and broke it.' The frog was then summoned, and he bowed to the Court and said, 'Sir a big black ant bit me sharply in the loins, causing me to jump and break the squirrel's ladder. So the king summoned the ant. The ant said, 'My Lord, how could I get past the frog if I did not bite him. I had to carry the rice meal for my uncle, who would be starved if I did not reach him, and the frog insisted that I should pass beneath him.'

The king found both the frog and the ant guilty, the former for not allowing the ant to pass and the latter for lack of patience. The ant was tied fast with the hair of a man's head. So now we see his waist so narrow! The frog was given a good beating by a sting-nettle, and so he is spotted all over!

Unlike other tribes, the Kacharis are not particular superstitious, and they make offering to the deity only on the outbreak of some serious illness like cholera, malaria, and so forth. But the Kacharis have a rich folklore and the legends and tales current with them are very interesting. Two of these delightful tales are given below :

### **The Origin of Thunder & Lightning**

There once lived a king who had a son called Raona and a daughter of the name of Raoni. One day the king observed that his son was sorrowful and asked him the reason. Raona made his father take an oath that if he told him he would fulfil his desire, and then said, 'Permit me marry Raoni.' The king was aghast to hear such a request, but he had

already given his word. He did not tell Raoni anything, and secretly prepared for the wedding

One day when Raoni went to fill water from a stream, an old woman told her of what was going on in the palace, and about the preparations for her marriage with her own brother, Raona. Hearing this Raoni immediately flew into the sky. When Raona saw her thus flying he called loudly after her. It is said that Raona's calls and threats to Raoni are the thunder in the sky, and when Raoni looks back for a moment to see if her pursuer is gaining on her, the brightness of her visage, glowing like, fire is what men call 'lightning.'

### **The Story of a Simpleton**

An old man and woman had only one son, who was a silly lad and a simpleton. One day he asked his father for some money to buy a wife with. Taking the money he went on his way. He saw a lovely young girl come to a watering place to fill water. The lad put his money on the ground, and seizing the girl, carried her off. The girl was rather plump and he soon got tired of carrying her, and rested under a tree. The girl began to weep profusely. Seeing her, a farmer came that way and asked him, 'Friend from where did you get this girl? 'I bought her for money,' the simpleton said. 'But did you not take a good look at her?' the farmer said. 'Don't you see her? Both her eyes have burst and the water is running copiously out of them.'

The simpleton was convinced, and exchanged the pretty girl for the farmer's ox. Soon he met a man with a goat. They sat down together, and by chance the ox began to ease himself. The man said, 'Ah friend, the belly of your ox has burst. He will die in a couple of days'. The simpleton believed him, and exchanged the ox for the man's goat.

Presently the simpleton met a man carrying bananas, and they got together. The goat kept saying, 'Ba-Ba'. (In Kachari language *ba* means 'carry me on your back'). The simpleton exclaimed 'How can I carry this wretched goat on my back!'

Saying this he exchanged the goat with the bunch of bananas.

Further on the simpleton met a man who came along snapping his fingers. The man asked him to give him the bananas but the lad said, 'I have got this with great difficulty and I will not give them to you'. The crafty man said, 'I will teach you the art of snapping the fingers if you give me the bananas.' The simpleton agreed. Thus when he returned home he came empty handed, having lost all his money, and merely snapping his fingers'.

The Meitheis of Manipur are very superstitious. They do not travel on certain days which they consider unlucky for certain directions. For example they will not go east on Monday and west on Tuesday. Similarly they avoid certain dates, as for example on the 2nd and the 10th of a month they will not go north and on the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 11th and 13th they will not go south. They also believe that inanimate objects begin suddenly to move. Stones raise themselves, drums begin to beat, and guns fire—all by themselves.

They also have a rich treasury of folk tales. An interesting one, is given here as an example.

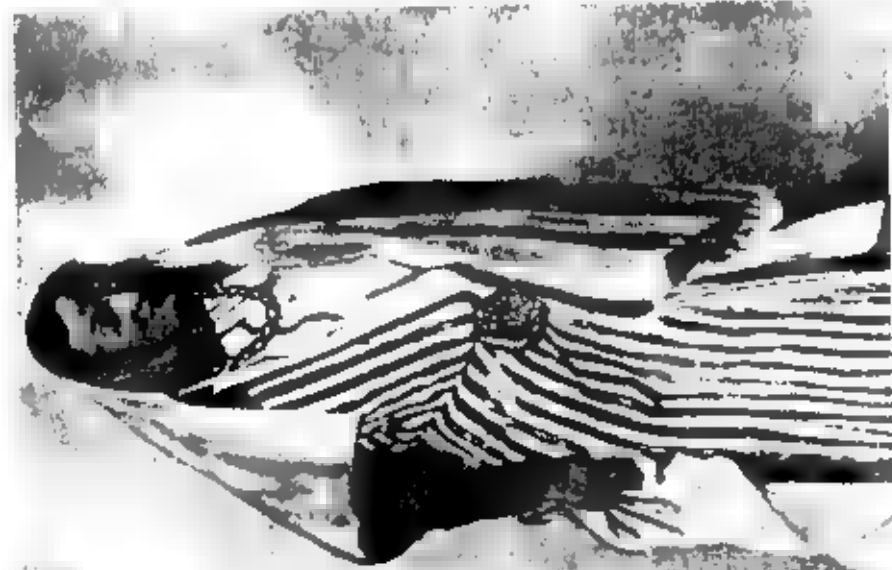
### **The Quarrelsome Brothers**

There once lived a poor man who had two sons. When he died he left behind him just a buffalo, a pomegranate tree, and a curtain. The younger brother was the more clever of the two, and he made a division of the property such that of the buffalo he kept the front part including the head, while the elder brother got lower part up to the tail; of the tree he took the upper half and gave his brother the lower, and the curtain he so arranged that he used it at night and left it for his brother to use it in the day.

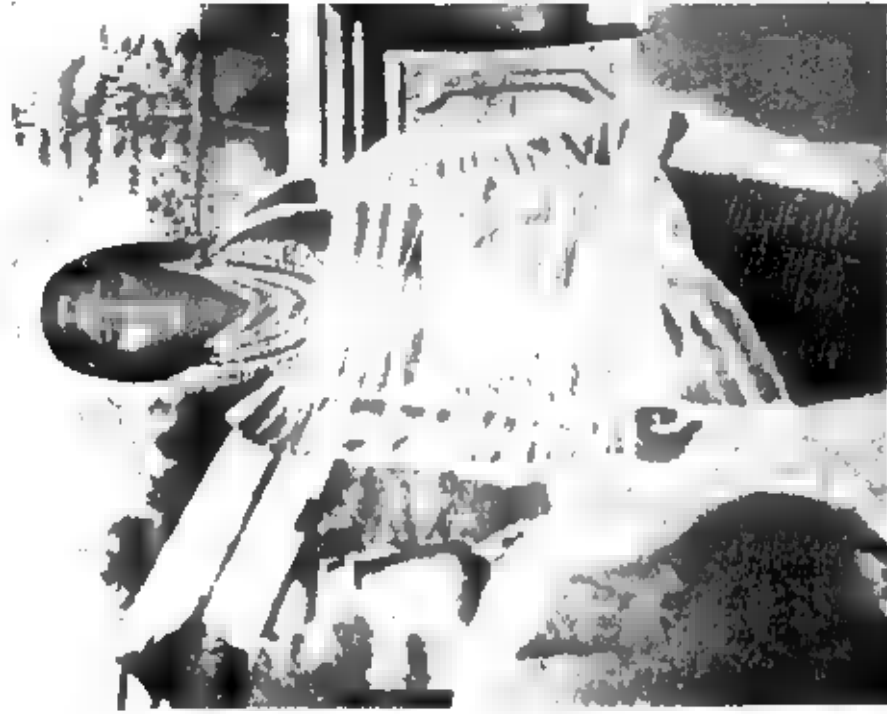
When the buffalo ate up the crop of others, the elder brother had to pay the damages, because, said the younger brother, the head was his; and he himself claimed the calves which were born, and the milk.

One day the elder brother, on the advice of his friends said to the younger one, 'Brother the buffalo eats up the crop of our neighbour and I have to pay a large amount of damages. So I propose to chop off my part of the buffalo, that is its head'. The younger brother thought about it and said, 'Let us share the calves and milk, and keep the buffalo alive'. Then the elder brother said, 'I need fuel, and I intend hacking off the pomegranate tree for it.' Since the lower part of the tree was his, the younger brother could not object, but he said, 'Let us share the pomegranates, and keep the tree alive.' The elder brother drenched the curtain in the dry and kept it in a pot of water, so that it was useless for the use at night. Seeing this the younger brother proposed that they use the curtain alternately between themselves.

After this the two brothers had no quarrel and lived amicably even after.



*Ka Rimai Synteng A Khari*



*Unmarried Manipur Girl*

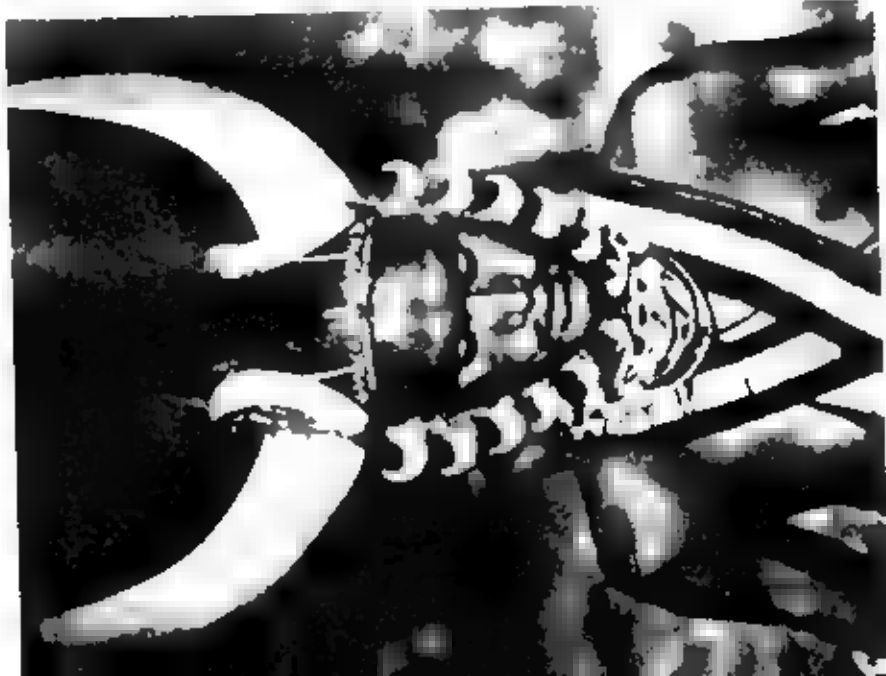


*The Girl's Dance at the Spring Festival*





*Kachari Man*



*Panso Warrior*

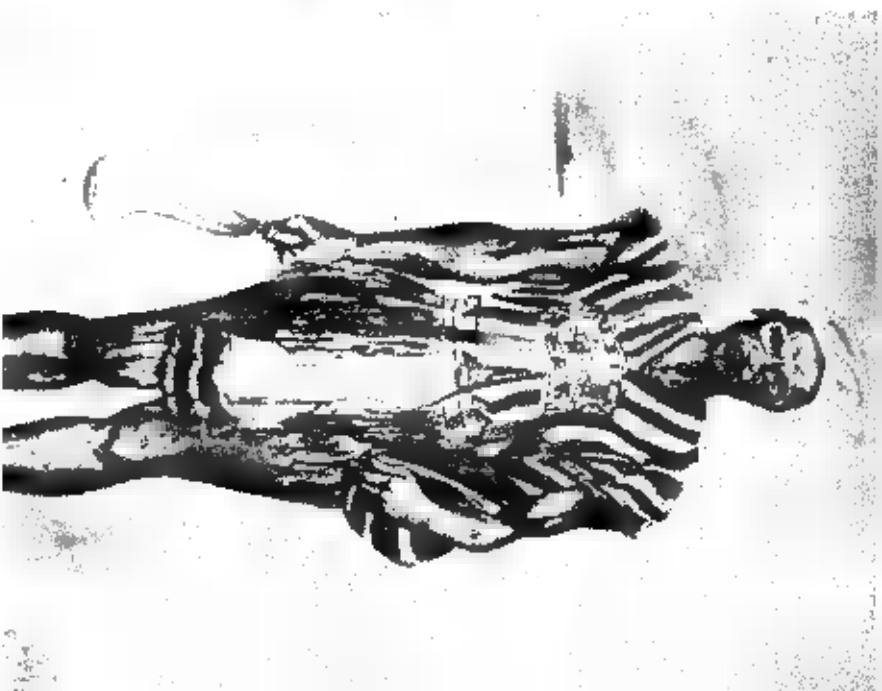




*An Angami village Girl*



*Newly married women of Angami Nagas*



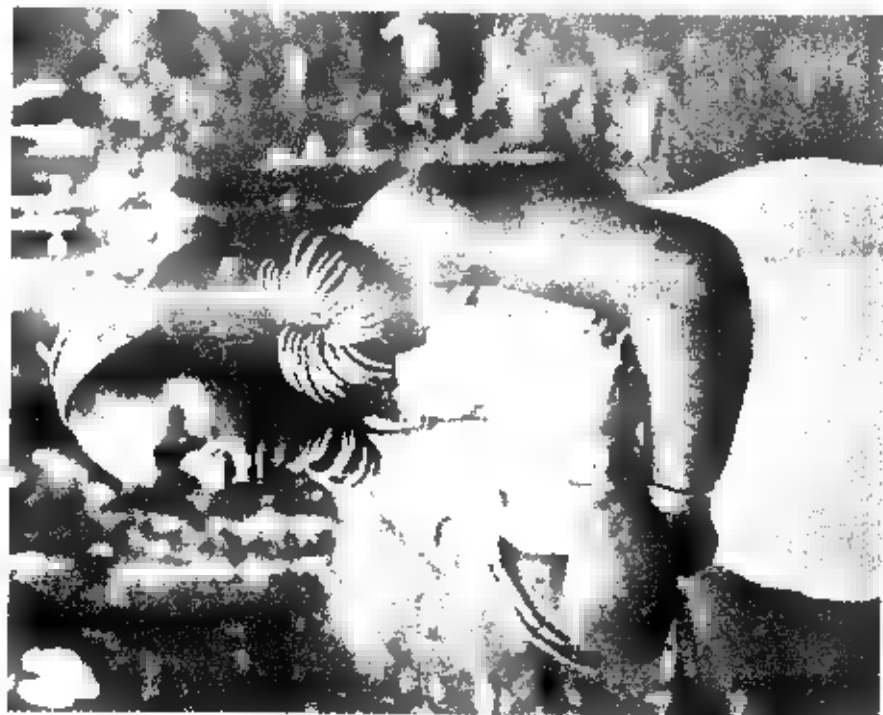
*Miskin woman*

Mikir Girl



Touli





*Garro Girl Wearing rings*



*A Koryak Youth with the tattoo of a herd-hunter*



*Konyak Girl with blackened teeth at a dance*



*The Bridal Pair*

# Index

## A

- Akawes tribe, 15
- Angami Nagas—cowries worn by the, 8
- dance of the, 53
- ear ornament, 8
- food eaten by the, 8-9
- food habits of the, 41

## B

- betels, 10. *See also* Khasis
- Bhoi, houses of the, 36-37
- bor-kapor, wrapper worn by the Mikirs, 17

## C

- Chisak tribe, 15
- complexion of the Khasis, 10.
- See also* Khasis

## D

- dances, 53-55
- danil, name of a Garo shield, 16. *See also* Garo
- dao (implement for odd jobs), 40, 53
- Dihri hunt of the Santhals, 48.
- See also* Santhals

## E

- egg, potency of the, 11. *See also* Khasis

## G

- Garo—adultery among the, 72
- appearance of the, 13
- dance of the, 54-55
- disputes and their decision, 84-85
- divorce among the, 70-71
- dress of the, 14
- dress of the women of the, 14-15
- fishing, 46-47
- food of the, 42
- houses of the, 37-39
- hunting, 46
- land laws of the, 75-76
- marriage customs of the, 64-65
- musical instruments of the, 52-53
- nature of the, 14
- ornaments of the, 15-16
- property and property laws, 80
- religious beliefs of the 98-101

- religious ceremonies of the, 101-105
- stature, 13
- styles, hair, 13
- tribal organisation of the, 58-59
- villages of the, 33
- weapons of the, 16
- women, 12
- ki pling*, arrow of the Khasi bow, 12
- Kacharis—adultery among the, 73
- divorce among the, 71
- fishing, 47
- folklore, 129-132
- food of the, 43
- houses of the, 18-19
- hunting, 47
- intermarriage, 18
- marriage customs of the, 67-68
- origin of the, 17
- property, 81
- religious beliefs and ceremonies, 109-111
- tribal organisation, 60
- villages of the, 18-19

## H

- head hunting by the Nagas, 9.
- See also* Nagas
- hornbill, Indian, 4

## J

- jacksil*, ornament worn by Garo headman. *See also* Garos
- Jaintia Hills, 9, 10, 75
- jappa*, basket in which Nagas keep clothes, 36
- jhum (jhumming), 24, 28, 74
- 'kang', a game, 49, 51
- keirup*, tiger club, 48
- Khasis—adultery among the, 71
- complexion of the, 10
- dances, 54
- disputes and their decision, 83-84
- divorce among the, 71
- dress of the, 11
- drinks, 42
- fishing, 46
- folk lore, 122-128
- folk tale, [friendliness of dog, 41-42
- food of the, 41-42
- games of the, 49-50
- habitat, 9-10
- houses of the, 36

## K

- kadisi*, round circular head ornament of Garos, 15
- ka jain kup*, Khasi cloak, 11
- ka jainsem*, garment of the Khasis, 11
- ka jympten*, cloth worn by Khasis, 11
- ka jain kup*, Khasi cloak, 11
- ka ryntieh*, Khasi bow, 12
- ka-tap-moh-khlieh*, Khasi wrapper, 11-12

- houses, ceremonies attending their building, 37
  - hunting, 45-46
  - jewellery, 12
  - land laws among the, 74-75
  - marriage customs of the, 63-64
  - musical instruments of the, 51-52
  - national game, archery, 12
  - nature of the, 10
  - origin of the, 10-11
  - property and property laws, 79-80
  - religious beliefs of the, 94-96
  - religious ceremonies of the, 96-98
  - stature of the, 10
  - stress on eggs, 11
  - villages of the, 33
  - weapons of the, 12
  - 'Kirata', non-Aryans, 3, 4
  - Kohima, 4
  - Kukis, 7
  - kut* and *kam*, main rooms of a Mikir's house, 39
- L**
- Lynngham—houses, 36-37
  - women, 12
- M**
- Mahabharata*, 4
  - Majisthan, central place in a Santhal village, 34
  - Manipuris—bed, 40
  - dances of the, 53-56
  - marang-jasku*, Garo woman's festive dress, 14
  - Marring Nagas, legend of the, 6
  - origin of the, 7
  - medicine man (*gaji-guru*) of the Khasis, 11
  - Meitheis, appearance, 19
  - bee-hunting, 48
  - disputes and their decision, 85-86
  - divorce, 71
  - dress of the, 19-20
  - folklore of the, 131-132
  - food eaten by the, 44
  - games of the, 51-52
  - houses of the, 39
  - hunting, 47-48
  - land laws of the, 76-77
  - marriage customs of the, 68-69
  - musical instruments of the, 53
  - origin of the, 18-19
  - ornaments of the, 21
  - religious beliefs and ceremonies, 111-113
  - superstition among the, 131
  - tribal organisation of the, 61
  - villages of the, 34
  - weapons of the, 21
  - Mikirs, adultery among the, 72-73
  - dances of the, 55
  - disputes and their decision, 85



- divorce among the, 71
- dress of the, 16-17
- fishing, 47
- folklore, 128-131
- furniture in houses of, 39
- games of the, 50
- houses of the, 39
- land laws of the, 76
- marriage customs of the, 66-67
- musical instruments of the, 53
- origin of the, 16
- ornaments of the, 17
- property, 80-81
- religious beliefs, 105-106
- religious ceremonies, 106-108
- tribal organisation of the, 59-60
- weapons of the, 17
- mithan, Naga horn for drinking, 36
- Morung, Naga dormitories, III
- favourite meal of, 40-41
- fishing, 45
- folklore of the, 117-122
- food and drink of the, 40-41
- games of the, 49
- groups of the, 3
- head hunting, 9
- houses of the, 34-36
- hunting, 44-45
- land laws of the, 73-74
- marriage customs of the, 61-63
- musical instruments of the, 51
- origin of the, 5-6
- origin of the word 'Naga', 3
- ornaments of the, 8
- property, 78-79
- religious beliefs, 87-90
- religious ceremonies, 90-94
- superstition among the, 116-117
- traits of character, 5
- tribal organisation of the, 56-58

## N

- Nongstoin, 37
- nadrong* (or *otonga*), ear-ornament of Garo men, 15
- Nagas, adultery among the, 71-72
  - different classes of, 3
  - disputes and their decision, 81-82
  - divorce among the, 69
  - families of the, 35

Nefa, 4

Nongstoin, 37

## O

- odoreka* (or *saichak*), folded turban worn by Garo women, 15

## P

*palha*, basket used by Kachari

women for fishing, 47  
 Palaung women, 11  
*phatika*, liquor drunk by  
 Kacharis  
*pieng blei*, bead necklace of  
 Khasi women, 12  
 population of the Naga State,  
 4

## R

*rupa-tylli*, silver collar-orna-  
 ment of the Khasis, 12

## S

Santhals, appearance, 21  
 —archery among the, 22  
 —divorce among the, 71  
 —disputes and their decision,  
 86  
 —food of the, 44  
 —hunting, 48  
 —land laws of the, 77-78  
 —origin of the, 21  
 —ornaments of the, 21  
 —religious beliefs and cere-  
 monies of the, 113-114  
*senki*, waist-band worn by  
 Garo women, 15-16  
*sept*, name of a Garo shield,  
 16  
 Shiva, 4  
 Siems, 37, 57, 80  
*shitshas*, brass rings worn by

Garo women in the ear, 15  
 summons, method of issuing,  
 57-58. *See also* Nagas  
 Syntengs, 37  
 —divorce among the, 70

## T

Tangkhum legend, 6

## U

U. Manik Raitong's tale, 51-52

## V

Veda, 3  
 Vishvakarma, architect god of  
 Hindus, 37  
 Vuites, legend of the, 7-9

## W

Wars, houses of the, 33  
 wigs, worn by Angami Nagas,  
 8. *See also* Angami Nagas

## Z

*zakhai*, basket used for fishing  
 by Kacharis, 47  
*zu*, rice beer, a favourite drink,  
 39, 41, 43  
*zuharo*, distilled liquor, 41



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